The

CITY OF COMRADES

BASIL KING

Foc 6

Lucy Lee Garth.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

Books by

BASIL KING

THE CITY OF COMRADES. Illustrated
ABRAHAM'S BOSOM
THE LIFTED VEIL. Illustrated
THE SIDE OF THE ANGELS. Illustrated
THE LETTER OF THE CONTRACT. Illustrated
THE WAY HOME. Illustrated
THE WILD OLIVE. Illustrated
THE INNER SHRINE. Illustrated
THE STREET CALLED STRAIGHT. Illustrated
LET NOT MAN PUT ASUNDER
IN THE GARDEN OF CHARITY
THE STEPS OF HONOR
THE HIGH HEART. Illustrated.

HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK
Established 1817

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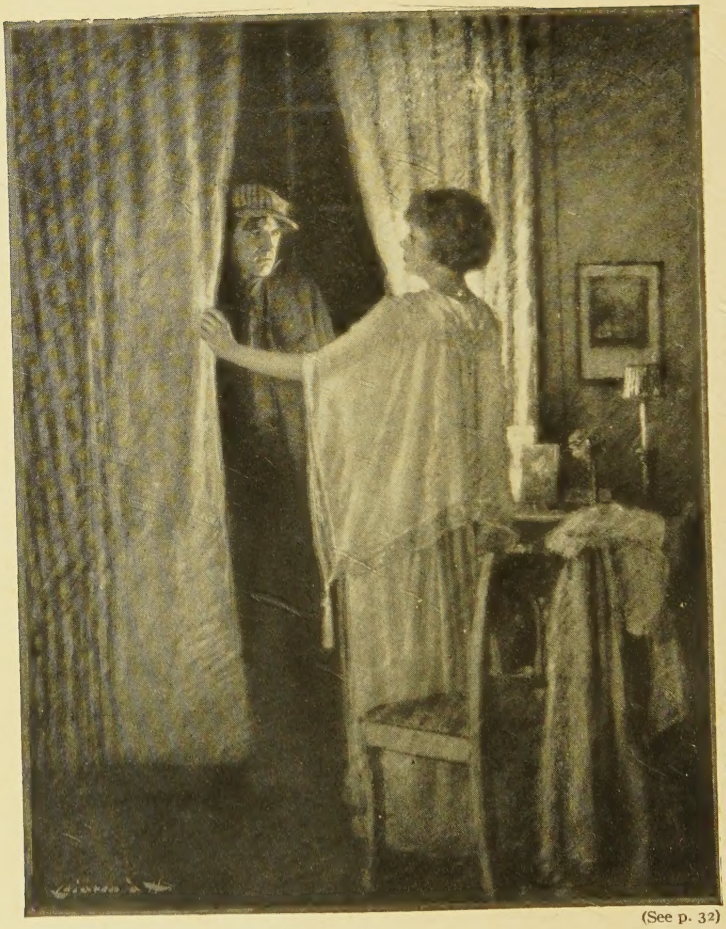

(See p. 32)

"'Sh!" was the first sound that came from her. "Don't make a noise or you'll frighten my friend. She's nervous already."

The
CITY OF COMRADES

BY

BASIL KING

Author of
"THE INNER SHRINE" "THE WILD OLIVE"
"THE WAY HOME" "THE HIGH HEART" ETC.

I dream'd in a dream, I saw a city invincible to the attacks
of the whole of the rest of the earth;
I dream'd that was the new City of Friends;
Nothing was greater there than the quality of robust love—
it led the rest;
It was seen every hour in the actions of the men of that city,
And in all their looks and words.

—WALT WHITMAN.

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON

THE CITY OF COMRADES

Copyright, 1919, by Harper & Brothers
Printed in the United States of America
Published March, 1919

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ILLUSTRATIONS

"'Sh!" was the first sound that came from her. "Don't make a noise or you'll frighten my friend. She's nervous already." . . Frontispiece

"Didn't you ever see any one put these pearls into his pocket before?" . . . . . Facing p. 204

"You're going home to marry me."

"How can I be going home to marry you, when —when I never knew till within half an hour that you—that you cared anything about me?" . . . . . " 290

"That you should 'ave come back to this—and me believin' the war 'ad done ye good— lifted you up, like. Not but what you was the best man ever lived before the war—" . . . . . " 344

THE CITY OF COMRADES

THE CITY OF COMRADES

CHAPTER I

"NO."

"No?"

"No."

In the slow swirl of Columbus Circle, at the southwest corner of Central Park, two seedy, sinister individuals could hold an exceedingly private conversation without drawing attention to themselves. There were others like us on the scene, in that month of June, 1913, cast up from the obscurest depths of New York. We could revolve there for five or ten minutes, in company with other elements of the city's life, to be eliminated by degrees, sucked into other currents, forming new combinations or reacting to the old ones.

In silence we shuffled along a few paces, though not exactly side by side. Lovey was just sufficiently behind me to be able to talk confidentially into my ear. My own manner was probably that of a man anxious to throw off a dogging inferior. Even among us there are social degrees.

"Yer'll be sorry," Lovey warned me, reproachfully.

"Very well, then," I jerked back at him over my shoulder; "I shall be sorry."

"If I didn't know it was a good thing I wouldn't 'a'

wanted to take ye in on it—not you, I wouldn't; and dead easy."

"I don't care for it."

"Ye're only a beginner—"

"I'm not even that."

"No, ye're not even that; and this 'd larn ye. Just two old ladies—lots of money always in the 'ouse—no resistance—no weepons nor nothink o' that kind; and me knowin' every hinch of the ground through workin' for 'em two years ago—"

"And suppose they recognized you?"

"That's it. That's why I must have a pal. If they'd git a look at any one it 'd have to be at you. But you don't need to be afraid, never pinched before nor nothink. Once yer picter's in the rogues' they'll run ye in if ye so much as blow yer nose. You'd just get by as an unknown man."

"And if I didn't get by?"

"Oh, but you would, sonny. Ye're the kind. Just look at ye! Slim and easy-movin' as a snake, y'are. Ye'd go through a man's clothes while he's got 'em on, and he wouldn't notice ye no more'n a puff of wind. Look at yer 'and."

I held it up and looked at it. A year ago, a month ago, I should have studied it with remorse. Now I did it stupidly, without emotions or regrets.

It was a long, slim hand, resembling the rest of my person. It was strong, however, with big, loosely articulated knuckles and muscular thumbs—again resembling the rest of my person. At the Beaux Arts, and in an occasional architect's office, it had been spoken of as a "drawing" hand; and Lovey was now pointing out its advantages for other purposes. I laughed to myself.

"Ye're too tall," Lovey went on, in his appraisement. "That's ag'in' ye. Ye must be a good six foot. But lots o' men are too tall. They gits over it by stoopin' a bit; and when ye stoops it frightens people, especially women. They ain't near as scared of a man that stands straight up as they'll be of one that crouches and wiggles away. Kind o' suggests evil to 'em, like, it does. And these two old ladies—"

As we reached the corner of the Park I rounded slowly on my tempter. Not that he thought of his offer as temptation, any more than I did; it was rather on his part a touch of solicitude. He was doing his best for me, in return for what he was pleased to take as my kindness to him during the past ten days.

He was a small, wizened man, pathetically neat in spite of cruel shabbiness. It was the kind of neatness that in our world so often differentiates the man who has dropped from him who has always been down. The gray suit, which was little more than a warp with no woof on it at all, was brushed and smoothed and mended. The flannel shirt, with turned-down collar, must have been chosen for its resistance to the show of dirt. The sky-blue tie might have been a more useful selection, but even that had had freshness steamed and pressed into it whenever Lovey had got the opportunity. Over what didn't so directly meet the eye the coat was tightly buttoned up.

The boots were the weakest point, as they are with all of us. They were not noticeably broken, but they were wrinkled and squashed and down at the heel. They looked as if they had been worn by other men before having come to the present possessor; and mine looked the same. When I went into offices to apply for work it was always my boots that I tried to keep out of sight; but it

was precisely what the eye of the fellow in command seemed determined to search out and judge me by.

You must not think of Lovey as a criminal. He had committed petty crimes and he had gone to jail for them; but it had only been from the instinct of self-preservation. He worked when he got a job; but he never kept a job, because his habits always fired him. Then he lived as he could, lifting whatever small object came his way—an apple from a fruit-stall, a purse a lady had inadvertently laid down, a bag in a station, an umbrella forgotten in a corner—anything! The pawnshops knew him so well that he was afraid to go into them any more—except when he was so tired that he wanted to be sent to the Island for a month's rest. In general, he disposed of his booty for a few pennies to children, to poverty-stricken mothers of families, to pals in the saloons. As long as a few dollars lasted he lived, as he himself would have said, honestly. When he was driven to it he filched again; but only when he was driven to it.

It was ten days now since he had begun following me about, somewhat as a stray dog will follow you when you have given him a bone and a drink of water. For a year and more I had seen him in one or another of the dives I hung about. The same faces always turn up there, and we get to have the kind of acquaintance, silent, haunted, tolerant, that binds together souls in the Inferno. In general, it is a great fraternity; but now and then—often for reasons no one could fathom—some one is excluded. He comes and goes, and the others follow him with resentful looks and curses. Occasionally he is kicked out, which was what happened to Lovey whenever his weakness afforded the excuse.

It was when he was kicked out of Stinson's that I had

picked him up. It was after midnight. It was cold. The sight of the abject face was too much for me.

"Come along home with me, Lovey," I had said, casually; and he came.

Home was no more than a stifling garret, and Lovey slept on the floor like a dog. But in the morning I found my shoes cleaned as well as he could clean them without brush or blacking, my clothes folded, and the whole beastly place in such order as a friendly hand could bring to it. Lovey himself was gone.

Twice during the interval he had stolen in in the same way and stolen out. He asked no more than a refuge and the privilege of sidling timidly up to me with a beseeching look in his sodden eyes when we met in bars. Once, when by hook or by crook he had got possession of a dollar, he insisted on the honor of "buying me a drink."

On this particular afternoon I had met him by chance in the region of Broadway between Forty-second Street and Columbus Circle. I can still recall the shy, half-frightened pleasure in his face as he saw me advancing toward him. He might have been a young girl.

"Got somethin' awful good, sonny, to let ye in on," were the words with which he stopped me.

I turned round and walked back with him to the Circle, and round it.

"No, Lovey," I said decidedly, when we had got to the corner of the Park, "it's not good enough. I've other fish to fry."

A hectic flush stole into the cheeks, which kept a marvelous youth and freshness. The thin, delicate features, ascetic rather than degraded, sharpened with a frosty look of disappointment.

"Well, just as you think best, sonny," he said, re-

signedly. He asked, abruptly, however, "When did ye have yer last meal?"

"The day before yesterday."

"And when d'ye expect to have yer next?"

"Oh, I don't know. Sometime; possibly to-night."

"Possibly to-night— 'Ow?"

"I tell you I don't know. Something will happen. If it doesn't—well, I'll manage."

He had found an opening.

"Don't ye see ye carn't go on like that? Ye've got to live."

"Oh no, I haven't."

"Don't say that, sonny," he burst out, tenderly. "Ye've got to live! Ye must do it—for my sake—now. I suppose it's because we're—we're Britishers together." He looked round on the circling crowd of Slavs, Mongolians, Greeks, Italians, aliens of all sorts. "We're different from these Yankees, ain't we?"

Admitting our Anglo-Saxon superiority, I was about to say, "Well, so long, Lovey," and shake him off, when he put in, piteously, "I suppose I can come up and lay down on yer floor again to-night?"

"I wish you could, Lovey," I responded. "But—but the fact is I—I haven't got that place any more."

"Fired?"

I nodded.

"Where've ye gone?"

"Nowhere."

"Where did ye sleep last night?"

I described the exact spot in the lumber-yard near Greeley's Slip. He knew it. He had made use of its hospitality himself on warm summer nights such as we were having.

"Goin' there again to-night?"

I said I didn't know.

He gazed at me with a kind of timid daring. "You wouldn't be—you wouldn't be goin' to the Down and Out Club?"

I smiled.

"Why should you ask me that?"

"Oh, I don't know. See you talkin' to one of those fellas oncet. Chap named Pyncheon. Worse than missions and 'vangelists, they are."

"Did you ever think of going there yourself?"

"Oh, Lord love ye! I've thought of it, yes. But I've fought it off. Once ye do that ye're done for."

"Well, I don't believe I'm done for—" I began; but he interrupted me coaxingly.

"I say, sonny. I'll go to Greeley's Slip. Then if you've nothin' else on 'and, you come there, too—and we'll be fellas together. But don't—don't—go to the Down and Out!"

As I walked away from him I had his "fellas together" amusingly, and also pathetically, in my heart. Lovey was little better than an outcast. I knew him by no name but that which some pothouse wag had fixed on him derisively. From hints he had dropped I gathered that he had had a wife and daughters somewhere in the world, and intuitively I got the impression that without being a criminal he had been connected with a crime. As to his personal history he had never confided to me any of the details beyond the fact that in his palmy days he had been in a 'at-shop in the Edgware Road. I fancied that at some time or another in his career his relatives in London—like my own in Canada—had made up a lump sum and bidden him begone to the land of reconstruction.

There he had become what he was—an outcast. There I was becoming an outcast likewise. We were "fellas together." I was thirty-one and he was fifty-two. My comparative youth helped me, in that I didn't look older than my age; but he might easily have been seventy.

Having got rid of him, I drifted diagonally across the Park, but with a certain method in the seeming lack of method in taking my direction. Though I had an objective point, I didn't dare to approach it otherwise than by a roundabout route. It is probable that no gaze but that of the angels was upon me; but to me it seemed as if every glance that roved up and down the Park must spot my aim.

For this reason I assumed a manner meant to throw observation off the scent. I loitered to look at young people on horseback or to stare at some specially dashing motor-car. I strolled into by-paths and out of them. I passed under the noses of policemen in gray-blue uniforms and tried to infuse my carriage with the fact which Lovey had emphasized, that I had never yet been pinched. I had never yet, so far as I knew, done anything to warrant pinching; and that I had no intentions beyond those of the ordinary law-abiding citizen was what I hoped my swagger would convey.

Though I was shabby, I was not sufficiently so to be unworthy to take the air. The worst that could be said of me was that I was not shabby as the working-man is at liberty to be. Mine was the suspicious, telltale shabbiness of the gentleman—far more damning than the grime and sweat of a chimney-sweep.

Now that I was alone again, I had a return of the sensation that had been on me since waking in the morning—that I was walking in the air. I felt that I bounced like

a bubble every time I stepped. The day before I had been giddy; now I was only light. It was as if at any minute I might go up. Unconsciously I ground my footsteps into the gravel or the grass to keep myself on the solid earth.

It was not the first time I had gone without food for twenty-four hours, but it was the first time I had done it for forty-eight. Moreover, it was the first time I had ever been without some prospect of food ahead of me. With a meal surely in sight on the following day I could have waited for it. More easily I could have waited for a drink or two. Drink kept me going longer than food, for in spite of the reaction after it the need of it had grown more insistent. Had I been offered my choice between food and life, on the one hand, and drink and death, on the other, I think I should have chosen drink and death.

But now there was no likelihood of either. I had husbanded my last pennies after my last meal, to make them spin out to as many drinks as possible. I had begged a few more drinks, and cadged a few more. But I had come to my limit in all these directions. Before I sought the shelter of Greeley's Slip a hint had been given me at Stinson's that I might come in for the compliments showered on Lovey ten days previously. Now as I walked in the Park the craving inside me was not because I hadn't eaten, but because I hadn't drunk that day.

Two or three bitter temptations assailed me before I reached Fifth Avenue. One was in the form of a pretty girl of eight or ten, who came mincing down a flowery path, holding a quarter between the thumb and forefinger of her left hand. Satan must have sent her. I could have snatched the quarter and made my escape, only that I lacked the nerve. Then there was a newsboy count-

ing his gains on a bench. They were laid out in rows before him—pennies, nickels, and dimes. I stood for a minute and looked down at him, estimating the ease with which I could have stooped and swept them all into my palm. He looked up and smiled. The smile didn't disarm me; I was beyond the reach of any such appeal. It was again that I didn't have the nerve. Lastly an old woman, a nurse, was dealing out coins to three small children that they might make purchases of a blind man selling bootlaces and pencils. I could have swiped them all as neatly as a croupier pulls in louis d'or with his rake—but I was afraid.

These were real temptations, as fierce as any I ever faced. By the time I had reached the Avenue I was in a cold perspiration, as much from a sense of failure as from the effort at resistance. I wondered how I should ever carry out the plans I had in mind if I was to balk at such little things as this.

The plans I had in mind still kept me from making headway as the crow flies. I went far up the Avenue; I crossed into Madison Avenue; I went up that again; I crossed into Park Avenue. I crossed and recrossed and crisscrossed and descended, and at last found myself strolling by a house toward which I scarcely dared to turn my eyes, feeling that even for looking at it I might be arrested.

I slackened my pace so as to verify all the points which experts had underscored in my hearing. There was the vacant lot which the surrounding buildings rendered so dark at night. There was the low, red-brown fence inclosing the back premises, over which a limber, long-legged fellow like me could leap in a second. There were the usual numerous windows—to kitchen, scullery, pantry,

laundry—of any good-sized American house, some one of which was pretty sure to be left unguarded on a summer night. There were the neighboring yards, with more low fences, offering excellent cover in a get-away, with another vacant lot leading out on another street a little farther down.

I had so many times strolled by the house as I was doing now, and had so many times rehearsed its characteristics, that I made the final review with some exactitude before passing on my way.

My way was not far. There was nothing to do but to go back into the Park. As it was nearly six o'clock, it was too late to search for a job that day, and I should have had no heart for doing so in any case. I had found a job that morning—that of handling big packing-cases in a warehouse—but I was too exhausted for the work. When in the effort to lift one onto a truck I collapsed and nearly fainted, I was told in a choice selection of oaths to beat it as no good.

I sat on a bench, therefore, waiting for the dark and thinking of the house of which I had just inspected the outside. It was not a house picked at random. It was one that had possessed an interest for me during all the three years I had been in New York. I had, in fact, brought a letter of introduction to its owner from the man under whom I had worked in Montreal. Chiefly through my own carelessness, nothing came of that, but I never failed, when I passed this way, to stare at the dwelling as one in which I might have had a footing.

The occupant was also a well-known architect in New York. In the architects' offices in which I found employment I heard him praised, criticized, condemned. His work was good or bad according to the speaker's point of

view. I thought it tolerably good, with an over-emphasis on ornament.

It was an odd fact that, in starting out on what was clear in my mind as a new phase in my career, no other house suggested itself as a field of operations. As to this one I felt documented, and that was all. I had no sense of horror at what I was about to do; no remorse from the position from which I had fallen. I suppose my mind was too sick for that, and my body too imperatively clamorous. I had said to Lovey that I didn't have to live—but I did. I had seen that very morning that I did. I had stood at the edge of Greeley's Slip and watched the swirling of the brown-green water with a view to making an end of it. One step and I should be out of all this misery and disgrace! The world would be rid of me; my family would be rid of me; I should be rid of myself, which would be best of all. Had I been quite sure as to the last point, I think I could have done it. But I wasn't quite sure. I was far from quite sure. I could imagine the step over the edge of Greeley's Slip as a step into conditions worse than those I was enduring now; and so I had drawn back. I had drawn back and wandered up-town, in the hope of securing a job that would give me a breakfast.

I wonder if you have ever done that? I wonder if you have ever gone from dock to station and from station to shop and from shop to warehouse, wherever heavy, unskilled labor may be in demand, and extra hands are treated with a brutality that slaves would kick against, in the hope of earning fifty cents? I wonder if in your grown-up life you have ever known a minute when fifty cents stood for your salvation? I wonder if with fifty cents standing for your salvation you ever saw the day

when you couldn't get it? No? Then you will hardly understand how natural, how much a matter of course, the thing had become which I was resolved to do.

It was no sudden idea. I had been living in the company of men who took such feats for granted. Their talk had amazed me at first, but I had grown used to it. I had grown used to the thing. I had come to find a piquancy in the thought of it.

Then Lovey's suggestions had not been thrown away on me. True, he was out for small game, while I, if I went in for it, would want something bigger and more exciting; but the basic idea was the same. Lovey could make a haul and live for weeks on the fruit of it; I might do the same and live for months. And if I didn't pull it off successfully, if I was nabbed and sent away—why, then there would be some let-up in the struggle which had become so infernal. Even if I got a shot through the heart —and the tales I heard were full of such accidents—the tragedy would not lack its element of relief. It might be out of one hell into another—but it would at least be out of one.

Not that I hadn't found a bitter pleasure in the life! I had. I found it still. In one of Dostoyevsky's novels an old rake talks of the joys of being in the gutter. Well, there are such joys. They are not joys that civilization knows or that aspiration would find legitimate; but one reaches a point at which it is a satisfaction to be oneself at one's worst. Where all the pretenses with which poor human nature covers itself up are cast aside the soul can stalk forth nakedly, hideously, and be unashamed. In the presence of each other we were always unashamed. We could kick over all standards, we could drop all poses, we could flout all duties, we could own to all crimes, and

be "fellas together." As I went lower and lower down it became to me a kind of acrid delight, of positively intellectual delight, to know that I was herding with the most degraded, and that there was no baseness or bestiality to which I was not at liberty to submit myself.

If there had never been any reactions from this state of mind!—but God!

It was a disadvantage to me that I was not like my cronies. I couldn't open my lips without betraying the fact that I belonged to another sphere. Though the broken-down man of education is not unknown in the underworld, he is comparatively rare. He is comparatively rare and under suspicion, like a white swan in a flock of black ones. I might be open-handed, ingratiating, and absurdly fellow-well-met, but I was always an outsider. They would take my drinks, they would return me drinks, we would swap stories and experiences with all outward show of equality; but no one knew better than myself that I was not on a footing with the rest of them. Women took to me readily enough, but men were always on their guard. Try as I would I never found a mate among them, I never made a friend. Therefore, now that I was down and out, I had no one of whom to ask a good turn, no one who would have done me a good turn, but poor, useless old Lovey sneaking in the shade.

I was in a measure between two worlds. I had been ejected from one without having forced a way into the other. When I say ejected I mean the word. The bitterest moment in my life was on that night when my eldest brother came to his door in Montreal and gave me fifty dollars, with the words:

"And now get out! Don't let any of us ever see your face or hear your name again."

As I stumbled down the steps he gave me a kick that didn't reach me and which I had lost the right to resent. He himself went back to the dinner-party his wife was entertaining inside, and of which the talk and laughter reached me as I stood humbly on the door-step. From the other side of the street I looked back at the lighted windows. It was the last touch of connection with my family.

But it had been a kindly, patient family. My father was one of the best known and most highly honored among Canadian public men. As he had married an American, I had a good many cousins in New York, though I had not made myself known to any of them since coming there to live. I didn't want them. Had I met one of them in the street, I should have passed without speaking; but, as it happened, I never met one. I saw their names in the papers, and that was all.

My father and mother had had five children, of whom I was the fourth. My two brothers were married, prosperous and respected—one a lawyer in Montreal, the other a banker in Toronto. My elder sister was married to a colonel in the British army; the younger one—the only member of the family younger than myself—still lived at home.

We three sons were all graduates of McGill, in addition to which I had been sent to the Beaux Arts in Paris. Out of that I had come with some degree of credit; and there had been a year in which I was in sight—oh, very distant sight!—of the beginning of the fulfilment of my childhood's ambition to revolutionize the art of architecture in Canada. But in the second year that vision went out; and in the third came the night on my brother Jerry's door-step.

I had nothing to complain of. The family had borne with me—and borne with me. When we reached the time when I was supposed to be earning my own living and my father's allowance came to an end, my mother, who had some money of her own, kept it up. She would be keeping it up still if she knew where I was—but she didn't know. From the moment of leaving Montreal I decided to carry out Jerry's injunction. They should neither see my face nor hear my name again. I didn't stop to consider how cruel this would be to the best mother a man ever had—to say nothing of the best father—or rather, when I did stop to consider it it seemed to me that I was taking the kindest course. I had no confidence in myself or in the future. New surroundings and associations would not give me a new heart, whatever hopes those who wished me well might be building on the change. For a new heart I needed something which I hadn't got and saw no means of getting.

CHAPTER II

SOMEWHERE about dusk I fell asleep. It was dark when I woke up. It was dark and still and sultry, as it often is in New York in the middle of June.

The lamps were lit in the Park, and in their glow shadowy forms moved stealthily. When they went in twos I took them to be lovers; when they went alone I put them down as prowlers of the night. I didn't know what they were after, but whatever it might be I was sure it was no good.

Not that that mattered to me! I had long been in a situation where I couldn't be particular. When I had risen and stretched myself I, too, moved stealthily, dogged by a crime I hadn't yet committed, but of which the guilt was already in the air.

As I had nothing by which to tell the time, I was obliged to wait till a clock struck. I hoped it was eleven at least, but when the sound came over the trees it was only nine. Only nine, and I could do nothing before one! Nothing before one, and nowhere to go! Nowhere to go, and no food to eat, and not a drop to drink! Doubtless I could have found water; but water made me sick. With four hours to wait, I thought again of the dark river with its velvety current, running below Greeley's Slip.

Aimlessly I drifted toward it—that is, I drifted toward Columbus Circle, whence I could drift farther still through squalid, fetid, dimly lighted streets down to the water's

edge. The night was so hot that the thought of the plunge began to appeal to me. After all, it would be an easy, pleasant way of stepping out.

But I didn't do it. The unknown beyond the river once more drove me back. Besides, the adventure I had planned was not without its fascination. I wanted to see what it held in store. If it held nothing—well, then, Greeley's Slip would still be accessible in the morning.

So I skulked back into the depths of the Park again. Those who went as twos began to disappear, and the lonely shadows to steal along more furtively. Now and then one of them approached me or hung in the distance suggestively. It was not like any of the encounters that take place in daylight. It was more as if these dark ghosts had floated up from some evil spirit land, into which before morning they would float down again.

But twelve o'clock struck at last, and I took midnight as a call. It was a call to leave the great human division in which I had hitherto been classed, and become a criminal. Once I had done this thing, I should never be able to go back. The angel with the flaming sword would guard that way, and I could never regain even such status as that which I was abandoning.

If my head had not been swimming I might at the last minute have felt a qualm at that, but my mind had lost the faculty of deconcentration. It was fixed on the thing before me in such a way that I couldn't get it off. For this reason I went, on leaving the Park, directly to the street and number where my thoughts were.

I was surprised by the emptiness and silence of the thoroughfares. Not till then had I remembered that at this season of the year most of the houses would be closed. Closed they were, looking dark and blank and forbidding.

I happened to know that the house to which I was bound was not closed; and though the fact that there were so few to pass in the streets rendered me more conspicuous, it also made me the less subject to observation.

Indeed, there were no observers at all when I approached the black spot made by the vacant lot. There was nothing but myself and the blackness. Not a light in the house! Hardly a light in any of the houses roundabout! Not a footfall on the pavements! If ever there was a good opportunity to do what I had come for, it was mine.

But I passed. The black spot frightened me. It was like a black gulf into which I might sink down. I repassed.

I went farther up the street and took myself to task. It was a repetition of my recoil from the children in the afternoon. I must have the nerve—or I must own to myself that I hadn't. If I hadn't it, then I had no alternative but Greeley's Slip.

I turned in my steps and passed the house again. If from the blank windows any one had been looking out my actions would have been suspicious. I went far down the street, and came back again far up it. Then when I had no more power of arguing with myself I suddenly found my footsteps crushing the dusty, sun-dried shoots of nettle and blue succory. I was in the vacant lot.

All at once fear left me. As well as any old hand in the business I seemed to know what lay before me. At every second some low-down prompting, sprung from nameless depths in my nature, told me what to do.

I noted in the first place how accurate the experts had been as to light and shade. The house stood so far up on one of the long avenues that the buildings were thinning out. So, too, the street lamps. They were no more

than in the proportion of two to three as compared to their numbers half a mile lower down. Just here they were so placed that not a ray fell into the three or four thousand square feet which had probably never been built upon since Manhattan was inhabited. Even the wall of the house was windowless on this side, for the reason that within a few months some new building would probably block the outlook.

Once I had crept close to the wall, I knew I presented neither silhouette nor shade to any chance passer-by. I could feel my way at leisure, cautiously treading burdock and fireweed underfoot. I came to the low wooden fence, in which there was a gate for tradesmen, which was possibly unlocked; but I didn't run the risk of a click. With my long legs a stride took me over into a small brick-paved court.

I paused to reconnoiter. The obscurity here was so dense that only my architect's instincts told me where the doors and windows would probably be. I located them by degrees. The doors I let alone. The windows I tried, first one and then another, but with no success. There was probably some simple fastening that I could have dealt with had I had a pocket-knife, but the one I had carried for years had long since been lying in a pawnshop. To reflect I sat down on the cover of a bin that was doubtless used for refuse.

A footstep alarmed me. It was heavy, measured, slow. With the ease of a snake I was down on my belly, crawling toward cover. Cover offered itself in the form of the single shrub that the court contained—lilac or syringa—growing close against the kitchen wall. Lovey would have commended the silence and swiftness with which I slipped behind it.

The footstep receded, slow, measured, heavy. Coming to the conclusion that it was a policeman in the Avenue, I raised my head. I had no sense of queerness in my situation. It seemed as much a matter of course as if I had been doing the same sort of thing ever since I was born.

There was apparently a providence in all this, for, looking up, I spied a window I had not seen before, because it was hidden by the shrub. This, if any, would have been neglected by the servants when they went to bed.

With scarcely the stirring of a leaf I got on my feet again—and, lo! the miracle. The window was actually open. I had nothing to do but push it a few inches higher, drag myself up and wriggle in. I accomplished this without a sound that could be detected twenty feet away.

Coming down on my hands and knees, I found myself amid the odor of eatables, chiefly that of fruit. I rested a minute to get my bearings, which I did by the sense of smell. I knew I must be in a sort of pantry. By putting out my hands carefully, so as to knock nothing over, I perceived that it was little more than a closet with shelves. A thrill of excitement passed through me from head to foot when my hand rested on an apple.

I ate the apple there and then, kneeling upright, my toes bent under me. I ate another and another. Feeling cautiously, I discovered a tin box in which there were bread and cake. I ate of both. Getting softly on my feet, I groped for other things, which proved in the main to be no more than tea, coffee, spices, and starch. Then my fingers ran over a strawlike surface, and I knew I had hold of a demijohn.

Smell told me that it contained sherry, and such knowl-

edge of housekeeping as I possessed suggested that it was cooking-sherry. I took a long swig of it. Two long swigs were enough. It burnt me, and yet it braced me. With the food I had eaten I felt literally like a giant refreshed with wine.

It occurred to me that this was a point at which I might draw back. But the spell of the unknown was upon me, and I determined to go at least a little farther. Very, very stealthily I opened the door.

I was not in a kitchen, as I expected to find myself, but in a servants' dining-room. I got the dim outlines of chairs and what I took to be a dresser or a bookcase. Another open door led into a hall.

My knowledge of the planning of houses aided me at each step I took. From the hallway I could place the kitchen, the laundry, and the back staircase. I knew the front hall lay beyond a door which was closed. At the foot of the back staircase I stood for some minutes and listened. Not a sound came from anywhere in the house. The kitchen clock ticked loudly, and presently startled me with a gurgle and a chuckle before it struck one. After this manifestation I had to wait till my heart stopped thumping and my nerves were quieted before venturing on the stairs. As the first step creaked, I kept close to the wall to get a firmer support for my tread. On reaching a landing I could see up into another hall. Here I perceived the glimmer or reflection of a light. It was a very dim or distant light—but it was a light.

I stood on the landing and waited. If there were people moving about I should hear them soon. But all I did hear was the heavy breathing of the servants, who were sleeping on the topmost floor.

Creeping a little farther up, I discovered that the light

was in a bedroom—the first to open from the front hall up-stairs. Between the front hall and the back hall the door was ajar. That would make things easier for me, and I dragged myself noiselessly to the top. I was now at the head of the first flight of back stairs, and looking into the master's section of the house. Except for that one dim light the house was dark. It was not, however, so dark that my architect's eye couldn't make a mental map quite sufficient for my guidance.

It was clearly a dwelling that had been added to, with some rambling characteristics. The first few feet of the front hall were on a level with the back hall, after which came a flight of three or four steps to a higher plane, which ran the rest of the depth of the building to the window over the front door. In the faint radiance through this window I could discern a high-boy, a bureau, and some chairs against the wall. I could see, too, that from this higher level one staircase ran down to the front door and another up to a third story. What was chiefly of moment to me was the fact that the bedroom with the light was lower than the rest of this part of the house, and somewhat cut off from it.

With movements as quiet as a cat's I got myself where I could peep into the bedroom where the lamp burned. It proved to be a small electric lamp with a rose-colored shade, standing beside a bed. It was a rose-colored room, evidently that of a young lady. But there was no young lady there. There was no one.

The fact that surprises me as I record all this is that I was so extraordinarily cool. I was cooler in the act than I am in the memory of it. I walked into that bedroom as calmly as if it had been my own.

It was a pretty room, with the usual notes of photo-

graphs, bibelots, and flowered cretonne which young women like. The walls were in a light, cool green set off by a few colored reproductions of old Italian masters. Over the small white virginal bed was a copy of Fra Angelico's "Annunciation." Two windows, one of which was a bay, were shaded by loosely hanging rose-colored silk, and before the bay window the curtains were drawn. Diagonally across the corner of this window, but within the actual room, stood a simple white writing-desk, with a white dressing-table near it, but against the wall. On the table lay a gold-mesh purse, in which there was money. I slipped it into my pocket, with some satisfaction in securing the first fruits of my adventure.

With such booty as this it again occurred to me to be on the safe side and to go back by the way I came. I was, in fact, looking round me to see if there was any other small valuable object I could lift before departing when I heard a door open in some distant part of the house—and voices.

They were women's voices, or, rather, as I speedily inferred, girls' voices. By listening intently I drew the conclusion that two girls had come out of a room on the third floor and were coming down the stairs.

It was the minute to make off, and I tried to do so. I might have effected my escape had I not been checked by the figure of a man looming up suddenly before me. He sprang out of nowhere—a tall, slender man, in a dark-blue suit, with trousers baggy at the knees, and wearing an old golfing-cap. I jumped back from him in terror, only to find that it was my own reflection in the pier-glass. But the few seconds' delay lost me my chance to get away.

By the time I had tiptoed to the door the voices were

on the same floor as myself. Two girls were advancing along the hall, evidently making their way to this chamber. My retreat being cut off, I looked wildly about for a place in which to hide myself. In the instants at my disposal I could discover nothing more remote than the bay window, screened by its loose rose-colored hangings. By the time the young ladies were on the threshold I was established there, with the silk sections pulled together and held tightly in my hand.

The first words I heard were: "But it will seem so like a habit. Men will be afraid of you."

This voice was light, silvery, and staccato. That which replied had a deep mezzo quality, without being quite contralto.

"They won't be nearly so much afraid of me," it said, fretfully, "as I am of them. I wish—I wish they'd let me alone!"

"Oh, well, they won't do that—not yet awhile; unless, as I say, they see you're hopeless. Really, dear, when a girl breaks a third engagement—"

"They must see that she wouldn't do it if she didn't have to. Here—this is the hook that always bothers me."

There were tears in the mezzo voice now, with a hint of exasperation that might have been due to the lover or the hook, I couldn't be sure which.

"But that's what I don't see—"

"You don't see it because you don't know Stephen—that is, you don't know him well."

"But from what I do know of him—"

"He seems very nice. Yes, of course! But, good Heavens! Elsie, I want a husband who's something more than very nice!"

"And yet that's pretty good, as husbands go."

"If I can't reaoh a higher standard than as husbands go I sha'n't marry any one."

"Which seems to me what's very likely to happen."

"So it seems to me."

The silence that followed was full of soft, swishing sounds, which I judged to come from the taking off of a dress and the putting on of some sort of negligée. From my experience of the habits of girls, as illustrated by my sisters and their friends, I supposed that they were lending each other services in the processes of undoing. The girl with the mezzo voice had gone up to Elsie's room to undo her; Elsie had come down to render similar assistance. There is probably a psychological connection between this intimate act and confidence, since girls most truly bare their hearts to each other when they ought to be going to bed.

The mezzo young lady was moving about the room when the conversation was taken up again.

"I don't understand," Elsie complained, "why you should have got engaged to Stephen in the first place."

"I don't, either"—she was quite near me now, and threw something that might have been a brooch or a chain on the little white desk—"except on the ground that I wanted to try him."

"Try him? What do you mean?"

"Well, what's an engagement? Isn't it a kind of experiment? You get as near to marriage as you can, while still keeping free to draw back. To me it's been like going down to the edge of the water in which you can commit suicide, and finding it so cold that you go home again."

"Don't you ever mean to be married at all?" Elsie demanded, impatiently.

"I don't mean to be married till I'm sure."

Elsie burst out indignantly: "Regina Barry, that's the most pusillanimous thing I ever heard. You might as well say you'd never cross the Atlantic unless you were sure the ship would reach the other side."

"My trouble about crossing the Atlantic is in making up my mind whether or not I want to go on board. One might be willing to risk the second step, but one can't risk the first. Even the hymn that says 'One step enough for me' implies that at least you know what that's to be."

"You mean that you balk at marriage in any case."

"I mean that I balk at marriage with any of the men I've been engaged to. I must say that; and I can't say more."

During another brief silence I surmised that Regina Barry had seated herself before the dressing-table and was probably doing something to her hair. I wish I could say here that in my eavesdropping I experienced a sense of shame; but I can't. Whatever creates a sense of shame had been warped in me. The moral transitions that had turned me into a burglar had been gradual but sure. With the gold-mesh purse in my pocket a burglar I had become, and I felt no more repugnance to the business than I did to that of the architect. Notwithstanding the natural masculine interest these young ladies stirred in me, I meant to wait till they had separated—gone to bed—and fallen asleep. Then I would slip out from my hiding-place, swipe the brooch or the chain that had been thrown on the desk, and go.

"What was the matter with the first man?" Elsie began again.

"I don't know whether it was the matter with him or with me. I didn't trust him."

"I should say that was the matter with him. And the next man?"

"Nothing. I simply couldn't have lived with him."

"And what's wrong with Stephen is that he's no more than very nice. I see."

"Oh no, you don't see, dear! There's a lot more to it than all that, only I can't explain it." I fancied that she wheeled round in her chair and faced her companion. "The long and short of it is that I've never met the man with whom I could keep house. I can fall in love with them for a while—I can have them going and coming—I can welcome them and say good-by to them—but when it's a question of all welcome and no good-by—well, the man's got to be different from any I've seen yet."

"You'll end by not getting any one at all."

"Which, from my point of view, don't you see, won't be an unmixed evil. Having lived happily for twenty-three years without a husband, I don't see why I should throw away a perfectly good bone for the most enticing shadow that ever was."

"I don't believe you're human." Before there could be a retort to this Elsie went on to ask, "How did poor Stephen take it?"

"Well, he didn't go into fits of laughter. He took it more or less lying down. If he hadn't—"

"If he hadn't—what?"

"Oh, I don't know. The least little bit of fight on his part—or even contempt—"

As this sentence remained unfinished I could hear Elsie rise.

"Well, I'm off to bed," she yawned. "What time do you have breakfast?"

There was some little discussion of household arrangements, after which they said their good nights.

With Elsie's departure I began for the first time to be uncomfortable. I can't express myself otherwise than to say that as long as she was there I felt I had a chaperon. In spite of the fact that I had become a professional burglar the idea of being left alone with an innocent young lady in her bedroom filled me with dismay.

I was almost on the point of making a bolt for it when I heard Elsie call out from the hallway: "Ugh! How dark and poky! For mercy's sake, come up with me!"

Miss Barry lingered at the dressing-table long enough to ask: "Wouldn't you rather sleep in mother's room? That communicates with this, with only a little passage in between. The bed is made up."

"Oh no," Elsie's staccato came back. "I don't mind being up there, and my things are spread out; only it seems so creepy to climb all those stairs."

"Wait a minute."

She sprang up. I breathed freely. My sense of propriety was saved. The voices were receding along the front hall. Once the young ladies had begun to mount the stairs I would slip out by the back hall and get off. Relaxing my hold on the silk hangings I stepped out cautiously.

My first thought was for the objects I had heard thrown down with a rattle on the writing-desk. They proved to be a string of small pearls, a diamond pin, and some rings of which I made no inspection before sweeping them all into my pocket.

I was ready now to steal away, but, to my vexation, the incorrigible maidens had begun to talk love-affairs again at the foot of the staircase leading up to the third

floor. They had also turned on the hall light, so that my chances were diminished for getting away unseen.

Knowing, however, that sooner or later they would have to go up the next flight, I stood by the writing-desk and waited. I was not nervous; I was not alarmed. As a matter of fact the success of my undertaking up to the present point, together with the action of food and wine, combined to make me excited and hilarious. I chuckled in advance over the mystification of Miss Regina Barry, who would find on returning to her room that her rings, her necklet, and her gold-mesh purse had melted into the atmosphere.

In sheer recklessness I was now guilty of a bit of deviltry before which I would have hesitated had I had time to give it a second thought. On the desk there was a scrap of blank paper and a pen. Stooping, I printed in the neat block letters I had once been accustomed to inscribe below a plan:

There are men different from those you have seen hitherto. Wait.

This I pinned to the pincushion on the dressing-table, beginning at once to creep toward the door, so as to seize the first opportunity of slipping down the back stairs.

But again I was frustrated.

"I'm all right now," I heard Elsie say, reassuringly. "Don't come up. Go back and go to bed."

Miss Barry spoke as she returned along the hall toward her room: "The cook sleeps in the next room to you, so that if you're afraid in the night you've only to hammer on the wall. But you needn't be. This house is as safe as a prison."

I had barely time to get into the bay window again and pull the curtains to.

Some five minutes followed, during which I heard the opening and shutting of drawers and closets and the swish and frou-frou of skirts. I began to curse my idiocy in fastening that silly bit of writing to the pincushion. My only hope lay in the possibility that she would go to bed and to sleep without seeing it.

With hearing grown extraordinarily acute I could trace every movement she made about the room. Presently I knew she had come back to the dressing-table again. Pulling up a chair, she sat down before it, to finish, I suppose, the arranging of her hair.

For a few seconds there was a silence, during which I could hear the thumping of my heart. Then came the faint rattling of paper. I knew when she read the thing by the slight catch in her breath. I expected more than that. I thought she would call out to her friend or otherwise give an alarm. If she went to a telephone to summon the police I decided to make a dash for it. Indeed, I meant to make a dash for it as it was, as soon as I knew her next move.

But of all the next moves, the one she made was the one I had least counted on. With a sudden tug at the hangings she pulled them apart—and I was before her.

I was before her and she was before me. It is this latter detail of which I have the most vivid recollection. In the matter of time all other recollections of the moment seem to come after that and to be subsidiary to it.

My immediate impression was of two enormous, wonderful, burning eyes, full of amazement. Apart from the eyes I hardly saw anything. It was as if the light of a dark lantern had been suddenly turned on me and I was blinded by the blaze. I was blinded by the blaze and

shriveled up in it. No words can do justice to my sudden sense of being a contemptible, loathsome reptile.

"'Sh!" was the first sound that came from her. She raised her hand. "Don't make a noise or you'll frighten my friend. She's nervous already."

Instinctively I pulled off my cap, stepping out of my hiding-place into the middle of the room. As I did so she recoiled, supporting herself by a hand on the writing-desk. Now that the discovery was made, I could see her grow pale, while the hand on the desk trembled.

"You mustn't be afraid," I began to whisper.

"I'm not afraid," she whispered back; "but—but what are you doing here?"

"I'll show you," I returned, with shamefaced quietness. "I shall also show you that if you'll let me go without giving an alarm you won't be sorry."

Pulling all the things I had stolen out of my pocket, I showered them on the dressing-table.

"Oh!"

The smothered exclamation made it plain to me that she hadn't missed the articles.

"May I ask you to verify them?" I went on. "If you should find later that something had disappeared, I shouldn't like you to think that I had carried it away."

She made a feint at examining the jewelry, but I could see that she was incapable of making anything like a count. It was I who insisted on going over the objects one by one.

"There's this," I said, touching the gold-mesh purse, but not picking it up. "I see there's money in it; but it has not been opened. Then there's this," I added, indicating the pearl necklet; "and this," which was the

brooch. "The rings," I continued, "I don't know anything about. There are three here. That's all I remember seeing; but I didn't notice in particular."

She said, in a breathless whisper, "That's all there were."

"Then may I ask if you mean to let me go?"

"How can I stop you?"

"Oh, in two or three ways. You could call your servants, or you could ring up the police—"

Her big, burning eyes were fixed on me hypnotically. The color began to come back to her cheeks, but she trembled still.

"How—how did you get in?"

I explained to her.

"And the only thing I've taken," I went on, "is the food I ate and the wine I drank; but if you knew how much I needed them—"

"Were you hungry?"

"I hadn't eaten anything for two days, and very little for two days before that."

"Then you're not—you're not one of those gentleman burglars who do this sort of thing out of bravado?"

"As we see in novels or plays. I don't think you'll find many of them about. I'm a burglar," I pursued, "or I—I meant to be one—but I'm not a gentleman."

"You speak like a gentleman."

"Unfortunately, a gentleman is not made by speech. A gentleman could never be in the predicament in which you've caught me."

"Well, then, you were a gentleman once."

"My father was a gentleman—and is."

"English?"

"I'd rather not tell you. Now that I've restored the

things, if you'll give me your word that I sha'n't be molested I shall—"

"You sha'n't be molested, only—"

As she hesitated I insisted, "Only what, may I ask?"

Her manner was a mixture of embarrassment and pity. She had not hitherto taken her eyes from me since we had begun to speak. Now she let them wander away; or, rather, she let them shift away, to return to me swiftly, as if she couldn't trust me without watching me. By this time she was trembling so violently, too, that she was obliged to grasp the back of a chair to steady herself. She was too little to be tall, and yet too tall to be considered little. The filmy thing she wore, with its long, loose sleeves, gave her some of the appearance of an angel, only that no angel ever had this bright, almost hectic color in the cheeks, and these scarlet lips.

"Was it," she asked, speaking, as we both did, in low tones, and rapidly—"was it because you—you had no money that you did this?"

I smiled faintly. "That was it exactly; but now—"

"Then won't you let me give you some?"

I still had enough of the man about me to straighten myself up and say: "Thanks, no. It's very kind of you; but—but the reasons which make it impossible for me to—to steal it make it equally impossible for me to take it as a gift."

"But why—why was it impossible for you to steal it, when you had come here to do it?"

"I suppose it was seeing the owner of it face to face. I'd sunk low enough to steal from some one I couldn't visualize—but what's the use? It's mere hair-splitting. Just let me say that this is my first attempt, and it hasn't

succeeded. I may do better next time if I can get up the nerve."

"Oh, but there won't be a next time."

"That we shall have to see."

"Suppose"—the mixture of embarrassment and pity made it hard for her to speak—"suppose I said I was sorry for you."

"You don't have to say it. I see it. It's something I shall never forget as long as I live."

"Well, since I'm sorry for you, won't you let me—?"

"No," I interrupted, firmly. "I'm grateful for your pity; I'll accept that; but I won't take anything else." I began moving toward the door. "Since you're good enough to let me go, I had better be off; but I can't do it without thanking you."

For the first time she smiled a little. Even in that dim light I could see it was what in normal conditions would be commonly called a generous smile, full, frank, and kindly. Just now it was little more than a quivering of the long scarlet lips. She glanced toward the little heap of things on the desk.

"If it comes to that, I have to thank you."

I raised my hand deprecatingly.

"Don't."

I had almost reached the threshold when her words made me turn.

"Do you know who I am?"

"I think I do," was all I could reply.

"Well, then, why shouldn't you come back later—in some more usual manner—and let me see if there isn't something I could do for you?"

"Do for me in what way?"

"In the way of getting you work—or something."

My heart had leaped up for a minute, but now it fell. Why it should have done either I cannot say, since I could be nothing to her but a fool who had tried to be a thief, and couldn't, as we say in our common idiom, get away with it.

I thanked her again.

"But you've done a great deal for me as it is," I added. "I couldn't ask for more." Somewhat disconnectedly I continued, "I think you're the pluckiest girl I ever saw not to have been afraid of me."

"Oh, it wasn't pluck. I saw at once that you wouldn't do me any harm."

"How?"

"In general. I was surprised. I was excited. In a way I was overcome. But I wasn't afraid of you. If you'd been a tramp or a colored man or anything like that it would have been different. But one isn't afraid of a—of a gentleman."

"But I'm not a—"

"Well then, a man who has a gentleman's traditions. You'd better go now," she whispered, suddenly. "If you want to come back as I've suggested—any time tomorrow forenoon—I'd speak to my father—"

"Not about this?" I whispered, hurriedly.

"No, not about this. This had better be just between ourselves. I shall never say anything to any one about it, and I advise you to do the same." I had made a low bow, preparatory to getting out, when she held up the scrap of paper she had crumpled in her hand. "Why did you write this?"

But I got out of the room without giving a reply.

I was descending the back stairs when I heard a door

open on the third floor and Elsie's voice call out, "Regina, are you talking to anybody down there?"

There was a tremor in the mezzo as it replied: "N-no. I'm just—I'm just moving about."

"Well, for Heaven's sake go to bed! It's after two o'clock. I never was in a house like this in all my life before. It seems to be full of people crawling round everywhere. I think I'll come down to your mother's bed, after all."

"Do," was the only word I heard as I stole into the servants' dining-room, then into the closet with shelves, where I shut the door softly. A few seconds later I was out on the cool ground, in the dark, behind the shrub.

I lay there almost breathlessly, not because I was unable to get up, but because I couldn't drag myself away. I wanted to go over the happenings of the last hour and seal them in my memory. They were both terrible to me and beautiful.

I had been there some fifteen minutes when I heard the open window above me closed gently and the fastening snapped. I knew that again she was near me, though, as before, she didn't suspect my presence. I wondered if the chances of life would ever bring us so close to each other again.

Above me, where the shrub detached itself a little from the wall of the house, I could see the stars. Lying on my back, with my head pillowed on the crook of my arm, I watched them till it seemed to me they began to pale. At the same time I caught a thinning in the texture of the darkness. I got up with the silence in which I had lain down. Crossing the brick-paved yard and striding over the low wall, I was again in the vacant lot.

It was not yet dawn, but it was the dark-gray hour

which tells that dawn is coming. I was obliged to take more accurate precautions than before, as, crushing the tangle of nettle, burdock, fireweed, and blue succory, I crept along in the shadow of the house wall to regain the empty street.

CHAPTER III

THE city was beginning to wake. Mysterious carts and wagons rumbled along the neighboring avenues. From a parallel street came the buzz and clang of a lonely early-morning electric car. Running footsteps would have startled one if they had not been followed by the clinking of peaceful milk-bottles in back yards. Clanking off into the distance one heard the tread of solitary pedestrians bent on errands that stirred the curiosity. Here and there the lurid flames of torches lit up companies of gnomelike men digging in the roadways.

Going toward Greeley's Slip, I skirted the Park, though it made the walk longer. Under the dark trees men were lying on benches and on the grass, but for reasons I couldn't yet analyze I refused to thrust myself among them. A few hours earlier I would have done this without thinking, as without fear; but something had happened to me that now made any such course impossible.

My immediate need was to get back to poor old Lovey and lie down by his side. That again was beyond my power to analyze. I suppose it was something like a homing instinct, and Lovey was all there was to welcome me.

"Is that you, sonny?" he asked, sleepily, as I stooped to creep into the cubby-hole which a chance arrangement of planks made in a pile of lumber.

"Yes, Lovey."

"Glad ye've come."

When I had stretched myself out I felt him snuggle a little nearer me.

"You don't mind, sonny, do you?"

"No, Lovey. It's all right. Go to sleep again."

For myself, I could do nothing but lie and watch the coming of the dawn. I could see it beating itself into the darkness long before there was anything to which one could give the name of light. It was like a succession of great cosmic throbs, after each of which the veil was a little more translucent.

In my nostrils was the sweet, penetrating smell of lumber, subtly laden with the memories of the days when I was a boy. The Canadian differs from the American largely, I think, in the closeness of his forest-and-farm associations. Not that the American hasn't the farm and the forest, too, but he has moved farther away from them. The mill, the factory, and the office have supplanted them —in imagination when not in fact, and in fact when not in imagination. If the woods call him he has to go to them—for a week, or two, or three at a time; but he comes back inevitably to a life in which the woods play little part. The Canadian never leaves that life. The primeval still enters into his cities and his thoughts. Some day it may be different; but as yet he is the son of rivers, lakes, and forests. There is always in him a strain of the *voyageur*. The true Canadian never ceases to smell balsam or to hear the lapping of water on wild shores.

It was balsam that I smelled now. The lapping of water soothed me as the river, too, began to wake. It woke with a faint noise of paddle-wheels, followed by a bellow like the call of some sea monster to its mate.

Right below me and close to the slip I heard the measured dip of oars. Hoarse calls of men, from deck to deck or from deck to dock, had a weird, watchful sound, as though the darkness were peopled with Flying Dutchmen. Lights glided up and down the river—which itself remained unseen—mostly gold lights, but now and then a colored one. Chains of lights fringed the New Jersey shore, where, far away, sleepless factories threw up dim red flares. A rising southeast wind not only hid the stars under banks of clouds, but went whistling eerily round the corners of the lumber-piles. The scent of pine, and all the pungent, nameless odors of the riverside, began to be infused with the smell—if it is a smell—of coming rain.

I can best describe myself as in a kind of trance in which past and present were merged into one, and in which there seemed to be no period when two wonderful, burning eyes had not been watching me in pity and amazement. As long as I lived I knew they would watch me still. In their light I got my life's significance. In their light I saw myself as a boy again, with a boy's vision of the future. The smell of lumber carried me back to our old summer home on the banks of the Ottawa, where I had had my dreams of what I should do when I was big. All boys being patriotic, they were dreams not merely of myself, but of my country. It worried me that it was not sufficiently on the great world map, that apart from its lakes and prairies and cataracts it had no wonders to show mankind. As we were a traveling family, I was accustomed to wonders in other countries, and easily annoyed when one set of cousins in New York and another in England took it for granted that we lived in an Ultima Thule of snow. I meant to show them the contrary.

From the beginning my ardors and indignations translated themselves into stone. I had seen St. Peter's in one country, St. Paul's in another, and Chartres and châteaux in a third. I had seen New York transforming itself under my very eyes—the change began when I was in my teens—into a town of prodigious towers which in themselves were symbolical. Then I would go home to a red-gray city, marvelously placed between river and mountain, where any departure from its original French austerity was likely to be in the direction of the exuberant, the unchastened, the fantastic. All new buildings in Canada, as in most of the States, lacked "school."

"School" was, more or less in secret, the preoccupation of my youth—"school" with some such variation from traditional classic lines as would create or stimulate the indigenous. I had not yet learned what New York was to teach me later—that necessity was the mother of art, and that pure new styles were formed not by any one's ingenuity or by the caprice of changing taste, but because human needs demanded them. Rejecting the art nouveau, which later made its permanent home in Germany, I combined all the lines in which great buildings had ever been designed, from the Doric to the Georgian, in the hope of evolving a type which the world would recognize as distinctively Canadian, and to which I should give my name. In imagination I built castles, cathedrals and theaters, homes, hotels and offices. They were in the style to be known as Melburyesque, and would draw students from all parts of the architectural earth to Montreal.

It was not an unworthy dream, and even if I could never have worked it out I might have made of it something of which not wholly to be ashamed. But as early

as before I went to the Beaux Arts the curse of Canada—the curse, more or less, of all northern peoples—began to be laid upon me. In Paris I had some respite from it, but almost as soon as I had hung out my shingle at home I was suffering again from its cravings. I will not say that I put up no fight, but I put up no fight commensurate with the evil I had to face. The result was what I have told you, and for which I now had to suffer in my soul the most scorching form of recompense.

The point I found it difficult to decide was as to whether or not I ever wanted to see Regina Barry again—or whether I had it in me to go back and show myself to her in the state from which I had fallen more than three years before. In the end it was that possibility alone which enabled me to endure the real coming of the dawn.

For it came—this new day which out of darkness might be bringing me a new life.

As I lay with my face turned toward the west I got none of its first glories. Even on a cloudy morning, with a spattering of rain, I knew there must be splendors in the east, if no more than gray and lusterless splendors. Light to a gray world is as magical as hope to a gray heart; and as I watched the lamps on the New Jersey heights grow wan, while the river unbared its bosom to the day, that thing came to me which makes disgrace and shame and humiliation and every other ingredient of remorse a remedy rather than a poison.

I myself was hardly aware of the fact till Lovey and I had crept out of our cubby-hole, because all round us men were going to work. Sleepers in the open generally rise with daylight, but we had kept longer than usual to our refuge because we didn't want to fare forth into the rain. As sooner or later it would come to a choice between

going out and being kicked out, we decided to move of our own accord.

I must leave to your imagination the curious sensation of the down and out in having nothing to do but to get up, shake themselves, and walk away. On waking after each of these homeless nights it had seemed to me that the necessity for undressing to go to bed and dressing when one got up in the morning was the primary distinction between being a man and being a mere animal. Not to have to undress just to dress again reduced one to the level of the horse. Stray dogs got up and went off to their vague leisure just as Lovey and I were doing. Not to wash, not to go to breakfast, not to have a duty when washing and breakfasting were done—knocked out from under one all the props that civilization had built up and deprived one of the right to call oneself a man.

I think it was this last consideration that had most weight with me as Lovey and I stood gazing at the multifarious activities of the scene. There were men in sight, busy with all kinds of occupations. They were like ants; they were like bees. They came and went and pulled and hauled and hammered and climbed and dug, and every man's eyes seemed bent on his task as if it were the only one in the world.

"It means two or three dollars a day to 'em if they ain't," Lovey grunted, when I had pointed this fact out to him. "Don't suppose they'd work if they didn't 'ave to, do ye?"

"I dare say they wouldn't. But my point is that they do work. It's Emerson who says that every man is as lazy as he dares to be, isn't it?"

"Oh, anybody could say that."

"And in spite of the fact that they'd rather be lazy,

they're all doing something. Look at them. Look at them in every direction to which your eyes can turn—droves of them, swarms of them, armies of them—every one bent on something into which he is putting a piece of himself!"

"Well, they've got 'omes or boardin'-'ouses. It's easy enough to git a job when ye can give an address. But when ye carn't—"

We were to test that within a minute or two. Fifteen or twenty brownies were digging in a ditch. Of all the forms of work in sight it seemed that which demanded the least in the way of special training.

Approaching a fiercely mustachioed man of clearly defined nationality, I said, "Say, boss, could you give my buddy and me a job?"

Rolling toward me a pair of eyes that would have done credit to a bandit in an opera, he emitted sounds which I can best transcribe as, "Where d'live?"

"That's the trouble," I answered, truthfully. "We don't live anywhere and we should like to."

He looked us over. "Beat it," he commanded, nodding toward the central quarters of the city.

"But, boss," I pleaded, "my buddy and I haven't got a quarter between us."

He pointed with his thumb over his left shoulder. "Getta out."

"We haven't got a nickel," I insisted; "we haven't got a cent."

"Cristoforo, ca' da cop."

As Cristoforo sprang from the ditch to look for a policeman, Lovey and I shuffled off again into the rain.

We stood for a minute at the edge of one of the long, sordid avenues where a sordid life was surging up and

down. Men, women, and children of all races and nearly all ranks were hurrying to and fro, each bent on an errand. It was the fact that life provided an errand for each of them that suddenly struck me as the most wonderful thing in creation. There was no one so young or so old, no one so ignorant or so alien, that he was not going from point to point with a special purpose in view. Among the thousands and the tens of thousands who would in the course of the morning pass the spot on which we stood, there would probably not be one who hadn't dressed, washed, and breakfasted as a return for his daily contribution to the common good. Never before and hardly ever since did I have such a sense of life's infinite and useful complexity. There was no height to which it didn't go up; there was no depth to which it didn't go down. No one was left out but the absolute wastrel like myself, who couldn't be taken in.

Though it was not a cold day, the steadiness of the drizzle chilled me. The dampness of the pavements got through the worn soles of my boots, and I suppose it did the same with Lovey's. The lack of food made the old man white, and that of drink set him to trembling. The fact that he hadn't shaved for the past day or two gave his sodden face a grisly look that was truly appalling. Though the pale-blue eyes were extinct, as if the spirit in them had been quenched, they were turned toward me with the piteous appeal I had sometimes seen in those of a blind dog.

It was for me to take the lead, and yet I couldn't wholly see in what direction to take it. While I was pondering, Lovey made a variety of suggestions.

"There doesn't seem to be nothink for it, sonny, but to go and repent for a day or two. I 'ate to do it; kind

o' deceivin' like, it is; but they'll let us dry ourselves and give us a feed if we 'ave a sense of sin."

I wondered if he had in mind anything better than what I had myself.

"Where?"

He took the negative side first.

"We couldn't go to the Saviour, because I've put it over on 'em twice this year already. And the 'Omeless Men won't do nothink for ye onless you make it up in menial work."

"I won't try either of them," I said, briefly.

"Don't blame you, sonny, not a bit. Kind o' makes a hypercrite of a man, it does. I 'ate to be a hypercrite, only when I carn't 'elp it."

He went on to enumerate other agencies for the raising of the fallen, of most of which he had tested the hospitality during the past few years. I rejected them as he named them, one by one. To this rejection Lovey subscribed with the unreasoning dislike all outcast men feel for the hand stretched down to them from higher up. Nothing but starvation would have forced him to any of these thresholds; and for me even starvation would not work the miracle.

"What's the matter with the Down and Out?" I sprang on him, suddenly.

He groaned. "Oh, sonny! It's just—just what I was afeared of."

I turned and looked down into his poor, bleared, suffering old face.

"Why?"

"Because—because—oncet ye try that they'll—they'll never let ye go."

"But suppose you don't want them to let you go?"

He backed away from me. If the dead eyes could waken to expression, they did it then.

"Oh, sonny!" He shook as if palsied. "Ye don't know 'em, my boy. I've summered and wintered 'em—by lookin' on. I've had pals of my own—"

"And what are they doing now, those pals of your own?"

"God knows; I don't. Yes, I do; some of 'em. I see 'em round, goin' to work as reg'lar as reg'lar, and no more spunk in 'em than in a goldfish when ye shakes yer finger at their bowl."

Afraid of exciting suspicion by standing still, we began drifting with the crowd.

"Is there much that you can call spunk in you and me?"

Again he lifted those piteous, drunken eyes. "We're fellas together, ain't we? We're buddies. I 'ear ye say so yerself when you was speakin' to that Eyetalian."

I have to confess that with his inflection something warm crept into my cold heart. You have to be as I was to know what the merest crumbs of trust and affection mean. A dog as stray and homeless as myself might have been more to me; but since I had no dog . . .

"Yes, Lovey," I answered, "we're buddies, all right. But for that very reason don't you think we ought to try to help each other up?"

He stopped, to turn to me with hands crossed on his breast in a spirit of petition.

"But, sonny, you don't mean—you carn't mean—on—on the wagon?"

"I mean on anything that 'll get us out of this hell of a hole."

"Oh, well, if it's only that, I've—I've been in tighter places than this before—and—and look at me now.

There's ways. Ye don't have to jump at nothink on-nat'rel. If ye'd only 'ave listened to me yesterday—but it ain't too late even now. What about to-night? Just two old ladies—no violence—nothink that 'd let you in for nothink dishonorable."

"No, Lovey."

We drifted on again. He spoke in a tone of bitter reproach.

"Ye'd rather go to the Down and Out! It 'll be the down, all right, sonny; but there'll be no out to it. Ye'll be a prisoner. They'll keep at ye and at ye till yer soul won't be yer own. Now all these other places ye can put it over on 'em. They're mostly ladies and parsons and greenhorns that never 'ad no experience. A little repentance and they'll fall for it every time. Besides"—he turned to me with another form of appeal—"ye're a Christian, ain't ye? A little repentance now and then 'll do ye good. It's like something laid by for a rainy day. I've tried it, so I know. Ye're young, sonny. Ye don't understand. And when it 'll tide ye over a time like this—they'll git ye a job, very likely—and ye can backslide by and by when it's safe. Why, it's all as easy as easy."

"It isn't as easy as easy, Lovey, because you say you don't like it yourself."

"I like it better than the Down and Out, where they won't let ye backslide no more. Why, I was in at Stinson's one day and there was a chap there—Rollins was his name, a plumber—just enj'yin' of himself like—nothink wrong—and come to find out he'd been one of their men. Well, what do ye think, sonny? A fellow named Pyncheon blew in—awful 'ard drinker for a young 'and, he used to be—and he sat down beside Rollins and pled with 'im

and plod with 'im, and—well, ye don't see Rollins round Stinson's no more. I tell ye, sonny, ye carn't put nothing over on 'em. They knows all the tricks and all the trade. Give me kind-'earted ladies; give me ministers of the gospel; give me the stool o' repentance two or three times a month; but don't give me fellas that because they've knocked off the booze theirselves wants every one else to knock it off, too, and don't let it be a free country."

We came to the corner to which I had been directing our seemingly aimless steps. It was a corner where the big red and green jars that had once been the symbols for medicines within now stood as a sign for soda-water and ice-cream.

"Let's go in here."

Lovey hung back. "What's the use of that? That ain't no saloon."

"Come on and let us try."

Pushing open the screen door, I made him pass in before me. We found ourselves in front of a white counter fitted up like a kind of bar. As a bar of any sort was better than none, Lovey's face took on a leaden shade of brightness.

In the way of a guardian all we could see at first was a white-coated back bent behind the counter. When it straightened up it was topped by a friendly, boyish face.

Lovey leaped back, pulling me by the arm.

"That's that very young Pyncheon I was a-tellin' you of," he whispered, tragically; "him what got Rollins, the plumber, out of Stinson's. Let's 'ook it, sonny! He won't do us no good."

But the boyish face had already begun to beam.

"Hel-lo, old sport! Haven't seen you in a pair of blue moons. Put it there!"

The welcome was the more disconcerting because in the mirror behind Pyncheon I could see myself in contrast to his clean, young, manly figure. I have said I was shabby without being hideously so, but that was before I had slept a fourth night on the bare boards of a lumber-yard, to be drenched with rain in the morning. It was also before I had gone a fourth morning without shaving, and with nothing more thorough in the way of a wash than I could steal in a station lavatory. The want of food, the want of drink, to say nothing of the unspeakable anguish within, had stamped me, moreover, with something woebegone and spectral which, now that I saw it reflected in the daylight, shook me to the soul.

I never was so timid, apologetic, or shamefaced in my life as when I grasped the friendly hand stretched out to me across the counter. I had no smile to return to Pyncheon's. I had no courtesies to exchange. Not till that minute had I realized that I was outside the system of fellowship and manhood, and that even a handshake was a condescension.

"Pyn," I faltered, hoarsely, "I want you to take me to the Down and Out. Will you?"

"Sure I will!" He glanced at Lovey. "And I'll take old Lovikins, too."

"Don't you be so fresh with your names, young man!" Lovey spoke up, tartly. "'Tain't the first time I've seen you—"

"And I hope it won't be the last," Pyn laughed.

"That 'll depend on how polite ye're able to make yerself."

"Oh, you can count me in on politeness, old sport, so long as you come to the Down and Out."

"I'll go to the Down and Out when I see fit. I ain't

goin' to be dragged there by the 'air of the 'ead, as I see you drag poor Rollins, the plumber, a month or two ago."

"Quit your kiddin', Lovey. How am I going to drag you by the 'air of the 'ead when you're as bald as a door-knob? Say, you fellows," he went on, pulling one of the levers before him, "I'm going to start you off right now with a glass of this hot chocolate. The treat's on me. By the time you've swallowed it Milligan will be here, and I can get off long enough to take you over to Vandiver Street." He dashed in a blob of whipped cream. "Here, old son, this is for you; and there's more where it came from."

"I didn't come in 'ere for nothink of the kind," Lovey protested. "I didn't know we was comin' in 'ere at all. You take it, sonny."

"Go ahead, Lovikins," Mr. Pyncheon insisted. "'E's to 'ave a bigger one," he mimicked. "Awful good for the 'air of the 'ead. 'Ll make it sprout like an apple-tree—I beg your pardon, happle-tree—in May."

Before Pyncheon had finished, the primitive in poor Lovey had overcome both pride and reluctance, and the glass of chocolate was pretty well drained. The sight of his sheer animal avidity warned me not to betray myself. While Pyncheon explained to Milligan and made his preparations for conducting us, I carried my chocolate to the less important part of the shop, given up to the sale of tooth-brushes and patent medicines, to consume it at ease and with dignity.

Pyncheon having changed to a coat, in the buttonhole of which I noticed a little silver star, and a straw hat with a faint silver line in the hatband, we were ready to depart.

"I'll go with ye, sonny," Lovey explained; "but I ain't a-goin' to stay. No Down and Out for mine."

"You wouldn't leave me, Lovey?" I begged, as I replaced the empty glass on the counter. "I'm looking to you to help me to keep straight."

He edged up to me, laying a shaking hand on my arm.

"Oh, if it's that— But," he added more cheerfully, "we don't have to stay no longer than we don't want to. There's no law by which they can keep us ag'in' our will, there ain't."

"No, Lovey. If we want to go we'll go—but we're buddies, aren't we? And we'll stick by each other."

"Say, you fellows! Quick march! I've only got half an hour to get there and back."

Out in the street, Lovey and I hung behind our guide. He was too brisk and smart and clean for us to keep step with. Alone we could, as we phrased it, get by. With him the contrast called attention to the fact that we were broken and homeless men.

"You go ahead, Pyn—" I began.

"Aw, cut that out!" he returned, scornfully. "Wasn't I a worse looker than you, two and a half years ago? Old Colonel Straight picked me up from a bench in Madison Square—the very bench from which he'd been picked up himself—and dragged me down to Vandiver Street like a nurse 'll drag a boy that kicks like blazes every step of the way."

As we were now walking three abreast, with Pyn in the middle, I asked the question that was most on my mind:

"Was it hard, Pyn—cutting the booze out?"

"Sure it was hard! What do you think? You're not on the way to a picnic. For the first two weeks I fought like hell. If the other guys hadn't sat on my head—well,

you and old Lovey wouldn't have had no glass of hot chocolate this morning."

"I suppose the first two weeks are the worst."

"And the best. If you're really out to put the job through you find yourself toughening to it every day."

"And you mean by being out to put the job through?"

"Wanting to get the durned thing under you so as you can stand on it and stamp it down. Booze 'll make two kinds of repenters, and I guess you guys stand for both. Old Lovey here"—he pinched my companion's arm—"he'll forsake his bad habits just long enough to get well fed up, a clean shirt on his back, and his nerves a bit quieted down. But he'll always be looking forward to the day when he'll be tempted again, and thinking of the good time he'll have when he falls."

"If you'll mind yer own business, young Pyn—" Lovey began, irritably.

"Then there's another kind," this experienced reformer went on, imperturbably, "what 'll have a reason for cutting the blasted thing out, like he'd cut out a cancer or anything else that 'll kill him. I've always known you was that kind, Slim, and I told you so nearly a year ago."

"I seen ye," Lovey put in. "Was speakin' about it only yesterday. Knew you was after no good. I warned ye, didn't I, Slim?"

Curiosity prompted me to say, "What made you think I had a motive for getting over it?"

"Looks. You can always tell what a man's made for by the kind of looker he is. As a looker you're some swell. Lovikins here, now—"

"If I can't do as well as the likes o' you, ye poor little snipe of a bartender for babies—"

"What 'll you bet you can't?" Pyn asked, good-naturedly.

"I ain't a bettin' man, but I can show!"

"Well, you show, and I'll lay fifty cents against you. You'll be umpire, Slim, and hold the stakes. Is that a go?"

"I don't 'ave no truck o' that kind," Lovey declared, loftily. "I'm a doer, I am—when I get a-goin'. I don't brag beforehand—not like some."

I was still curious, however, about myself.

"And what did you make out of my looks, Pyn?"

He stopped, stood off, and eyed me.

"Do you know what you're like now?"

"I know I'm not like anything human."

"You're like a twenty-dollar bill that's been in every pawnshop, and every bar, and every old woman's stocking, and every old bum's pocket, and is covered with dirt and grease and microbes till you wouldn't hardly hold it in your hand; but it's still a twenty-dollar bill—that 'll buy twenty dollars' worth every time—and whenever you like you can get gold for it."

"Thank you, Pyn," I returned, humbly, as we went on our way again. "That's the whitest thing that has ever been said to me."

Before we reached Vandiver Street, Pyn had given us two bits of information, both of which I was glad to receive.

One was entirely personal, being a brief survey of his fall and rise. The son of a barber in one of the small towns near New York, he had gone to work with a druggist on leaving the high school. His type, as he described it, had been from the beginning that of the cheap sport. Cheap sports had been his companions, and before he

was twenty-one he had married a pretty manicure girl from his father's establishment. He had married her while on a spree, and after the spree had repented. Repenting chiefly because he wasn't earning enough to keep a wife, he threw the blame for his mistake on her. When a baby came he was annoyed; when a second baby came he was desperate; when a third baby promised to appear he was overwhelmed. Since the expenses of being a cheap sport couldn't be reduced, he saw no resource but flight to New York, leaving his wife to fend for herself and her children.

Folly having made of him a hard drinker, remorse made of him a harder one. And since no young fellow of twenty-four is callous enough to take wife-desertion with an easy conscience, my own first talks with him had been filled with maudlin references to a kind of guilt I hadn't at the time understood. All I knew was that from bad he had gone to worse, and from worse he was on the way to the worst of all, when old Colonel Straight rescued him.

The tale of that rescue unfolded some of the history of the Down and Out. As to that, Pyn laid the emphasis on the fact that the club was not a mission—that is, it was not the effort of the safe to help those who are in danger; it was the effort of those who are in danger to help themselves. Built up on unassisted effort, it was self-respecting. No bribes had ever been offered it, and no persuasions but such as a man who has got out of hell can bring to bear on another who is still frying in the fire. Its action being not from the top downward, but from the bottom upward, it had a native impulse to expansion.

Its inception had been an accident. Two men who had first met as Pyncheon and I had first met had lost sight of each other for several years. At a time when each

had worked his salvation out they had come together by accident on Broadway, and later had by another accident become responsible for a third. Finding him one night lying on the pavement of a lonely street, they had seemingly had no choice but to pick him up and carry him to a cheap but friendly hostelry which they knew would not refuse him. Here they had kept him till he had sobered up and taken the job they found for him. Watching over him for months, they finally had the pleasure of restoring him to his wife and seeing a broken home put on its feet again. This third man, in gratitude for what had been done for him, went after a fourth, and the fourth after a fifth, and so the chain was flung out. By the time their number had increased to some twenty-five or thirty Providence offered them a dwelling-place.

The dwelling-place, with the few apparently worthless articles it contained, was all the club had ever accepted as a gift. Even that might have been declined had it not been for the fact that it was going begging. When old Miss Smedley died it was found that she had left her residence in Vandiver Place as a legacy to St. David's Church, across the way. She had left it, however, as an empty residence. As an empty residence it was in a measure a white elephant on the hands of a legatee that had no immediate use for it.

St. David's Church, you will remember, was not now the fashionable house of prayer it had been in its early days. Time was when Vandiver Place was the heart of exclusive New York. In the 'forties and 'fifties no section of the city had been more select. In the 'sixties and 'seventies, when Doctor Grace was rector of St. David's, it had become time-honored. In the 'eighties and 'nineties the old families began to move up-town and the boarding-

houses to creep in; and in the early years of the twentieth century the residents ceded the ground entirely to the manufacturer of artificial flowers and the tailor of the ready-to-wear. In 1911 the line of houses that made it a cul-de-sac was torn down and a broad thoroughfare cut through a congeries of slums, the whole being named Vandiver Street. Vandiver Place was gone; and with it went Miss Smedley.

Rufus Legrand, who succeeded Doctor Grace as rector of St. David's, offered Miss Smedley's house as a home for the Down and Out; but it was Beady Lamont, a husky furniture-mover and ardent member of the club, who suggested this philanthropic opportunity to Rufus Legrand.

"Say, reverent, my buddy's give in at last, on'y I haven't got no place to put him. But, say, reverent, there's that old house I helped to move the sticks out of two or three months ago. There's three beds left in it, and a couple of chairs. Me and him could bunk there for a few nights, while he got straightened out, and—"

"But you'd have no bedclothes."

"Say, reverent, we don't want no bedclothes. Sleepin' in the Park 'll learn you how to do without sheets."

"My daughter, Mrs. Ralph Coningsby, could undoubtedly supply you with some."

"Say, reverent, that ain't our way. We don't pass the buck on no one. What we haven't got we do without till we can pay for it ourselves. But that old house ain't doin' nothing but sit on its haunches; and if I could just get Tiger into the next bed to mine at night—we don't want no bedclothes nor nothing but what we lay down in—and take him along with me when I go to work by day, so as to keep my search-lights on him, like—"

Rufus Legrand had already sufficiently weighed the proposal.

"I'm sure I don't see why you shouldn't sleep in the old place as long as you like, Beady, if you can only make yourselves comfortable."

"Say, reverent, now you're shouting."

So another accident settled the fate of Miss Smedley's lifelong home; and before many weeks the Down and Out was in full possession.

It was in full possession of the house with the refuse the heirs had not considered good enough to take away—three iron bedsteads that the servants had used; an equal number of humble worn-out mattresses; two tolerably solid wooden chairs, three that needed repairs, which were speedily given them; some crockery more or less chipped and cracked; and a stained steel-engraving of Franklin in the *salon* of Marie Antoinette.

True to its principles, the club accepted neither gifts of money nor contributions in kind. Its members were all graduates of the school of doing without. To those who came there a roof over the head was a luxury, while to have a friend to stand by them and care whether they went to the devil or not was little short of a miracle.

But by the time Billy Pyncheon had been brought in by old Colonel Straight, gratitude, sacrifice, and enthusiasm on the part of one or another of the members had adequately fitted up this house to which Lovey and I were on the way. It had become, too, the one institution of which the saloon-keepers of my acquaintance were afraid. We were all afraid of it. It had worked so many wonders among our pals that we had come to look on it as a home of the necromantic. Missions of any kind we knew how to cope with; but in the Down and Out there

was a sort of wizardry that tamed the wildest hearts among us, cast out devils, and raised the nearly dead. I myself for a year or more—ever since I had seen the spell it had wrought on Pyn, for whom from the first I had felt a sympathy—had been haunted by the dread of it; and here I was at the door.

The door when we got to it was something of a disappointment. It was at the head of a flight of old-time brownstone steps, and was just like any other door. About it was nothing of the magical or cabalistic Lovey and I had been half expecting.

More impressive was the neat little man who opened to our ring. He was a wan, wistful, smiling little figure of sixty-odd, on whom all the ends of the world seemed to have come. He was like a man who has been dead and buried and has come to life again—but who shows he has been dead. If I had to look like that . . .

But I took comfort in the thought of Pyn. Pyn showed nothing. He was like one of the three holy men who went through Nebuchadnezzar's furnace—the smell of fire had not passed on him. A heartier, healthier, merrier fellow it would have been difficult to find.

He entered now with the air of authority which belongs to the member of a club.

"Fellows had their breakfast, Spender?"

Spender was all welcome, of the wistful, yearning kind.

"The men at work is gone; but the guys under restraint is still at table."

"Mr. Christian not here yet?"

"Never gets here before nine; and it's not half past seven yet."

Pyn turned to me. "Say, do you want to go in and feed, or will you wash up first, or go to bed, or what?"

With this large liberty of choice I asked if we could do whatever we liked. It was Spender who explained.

"That's the rule for new arrivals, unless they've got to be put under restraint at once."

"I don't want to be put under no restraint," Lovey declared, indignantly.

"That 'll be all right," Spender replied, kindly, "unless there's vermin—"

Lovey jumped.

"See here, now! Don't you begin no such immodest talk to me."

"There, there, Lovikins," Pyn broke in. "Spender don't mean no harm. All sorts have to come to a place like this. But when we see a gentleman we treat him like a gentleman. All Spender wants to know is this, Is it eats for you first, or a bath?"

"And I don't want no bath," Lovey declared, proudly.

"Then it 'll be eats. Quick march! I've got to beat it back to my job."

Pyn's introduction of us to those already in the dining-room was simple.

"This is Lovey. This is Slim. You guys 'll make 'em feel at home."

Making us feel at home consisted in moving along the table so as to give us room. In words there was no response to Pyn, who withdrew at once, nor was there more than a cursory inspection of us with the eyes. Whatever was kindly was in the atmosphere, and that was perceptible.

As we sat before two empty places, one of our new companions rose, went to the dresser behind us, and brought us each a plate, a spoon, a knife, and a cup and saucer. A big man went to the kitchen door and in a voice like thunder called out, "Mouse!"

By the time he had returned to his place a stumpy individual with a big red mustache and a limp appeared on the threshold. An explanation of the summons was given him when a third of our friends pointed at us with a spoonful of oatmeal porridge before he put it in his mouth.

Mouse withdrew into the kitchen, coming back with two basins of porridge, which he placed, steaming hot, before us. Presently, too, he filled our cups with coffee. Bread and butter, sugar and milk, were all on the table. The meal went on in silence, except for the smacking of lips and the clinking of spoons on the crockeryware.

Of our fellow-guests I can only say that they presented different phases of the forlorn. The man next to me was sallow, hatchet-faced, narrow-breasted, weak of physique, and looked as if he might have been a tailor. His hair was a shock of unkempt black curls, and his dark eyes the largest and longest and most luminous I ever saw in a man. In their nervous glance they made me think of a horse's eyes, especially when he rolled them toward me timidly.

Opposite was a sandy, freckled-face type, whom I easily diagnosed as a Scotchman. Light hair, light eyebrows, and a heavy reddish mustache set off a face scored with a few deep wrinkles, and savage like that of a beast fretted with a sense of helplessness. The shaking hand that passed the bread to me was muscular, freckled, and covered with coarse, reddish hairs. I put him down as a gardener.

At the head of the table was a huge, unwieldy fellow who looked as if he had all run to fat, but who, as I afterward learned, was a mass of muscle and sinew, like a Japanese wrestler. He had bloated cheeks and bloated hands, and a voice so big and bass that when he spoke,

as he did on going to the door to summon Mouse, he almost shook the dishes on the dresser. He proved to be, too, a pal of Beady Lamont's, and as a piano-mover by profession he frequented Beady's spheres.

At the big man's right was a poor little whippersnapper, not more than five foot two, who looked as if a puff would blow him away; and opposite him a tall, spare, fine-looking Irishman, a hospital attendant, whose face would have been full of humor had it not been convulsed for the time being with a sense of mortal anguish. It was he who had brought us our dishes and took pains to see that our needs were supplied.

No more than any of the others were we eager for conversation. The fact that we were having good warm food served in a more or less regular way was enough to occupy all that was uppermost in our thoughts. Poor Lovey ate as he had drunk the chocolate half an hour before, with a greed that was almost terrible. Once more I might have done the same had I not taken his example as a warning. Not that anything I did would have attracted attention in that particular gathering. Each man's gaze was turned inward. His soul's tragedy absorbed him to the exclusion of everything else. Reaction from the stupor of excess brought nothing but a sense of woe. There was woe on all faces. There would have been woe in all thoughts if conscious thought had not been outside the range of these drugged and stultified faculties.

What was more active than anything else was a blind fellow-feeling. They did little things for one another. They did little watchful things for Lovey and me. They even quarreled over their kindnesses like children eager to make themselves useful.

"You'll want to know where the barth-room is," the timid tailor said to me as we rose from the table. "I'll show you."

There was a snarl from the whippersnapper across the way.

"Aw, put your lid on, Headlights. How long have you been showin' barth-rooms in this here shebang?" He beckoned to me. "You come along o' me, Slim—"

It was the Irishman who intervened to keep the peace.

"Listen to Daisy now, will you? He's like a fox-terrier that owns the house and grounds and barks at every wan who goes by. Look now, Daisy! You take this ould gent up to the bath-room on the top floor; and you, Headlights, show Slim to the one on the second floor, and every wan o' you 'll have a bite at the cake."

With this peaceable division of the honors we started off.

I must describe the club as very humble. The rooms themselves, as was natural with an old New York residence, did not lack dignity. Though too narrow for their height, they had admirable cornices and some exquisite ceiling medallions. It is probable, too, that in days when there were no skyscrapers in the neighborhood the house was light enough, but now it wore a general air of dimness. The furnishings were just what you might have expected from the efforts of very poor men in giving of their small superfluity. There were plenty of plain wooden chairs, and a sufficiency of tables to match them. In the two down-stairs sitting-rooms, which must once have been Miss Smedley's front and back drawing-rooms, there were benches against the wall. A roll-top desk, which I learned was the official seat of Mr. Christian, was so placed as to catch the light from Vandiver Street. A

plain, black, wooden cross between the two front windows, and Franklin in the *salon* of Marie Antoinette in the place of honor over a fine old white marble mantelpiece, completed the two reception-rooms.

The floor above was given over to the dormitories for outsiders, and contained little more than beds. They were small iron beds, made up without counterpanes. As every man made his own, the result would not have passed the inspection of a high-class chambermaid, but they satisfied those who lay down in them. Since outsiders came in, like Lovey and me, with little or nothing in the way of belongings, it was unnecessary to make further provision for their wardrobes than could be found in the existing closets and shelves. In the front bedroom, which I suppose must have been Miss Smedley's, there were nine small beds; in the room back of that there were seven; and in a small room over the kitchen, given up to the men positively under restraint, there were five. Twenty-one outsiders could thus be cared for at a time.

On the third floor were the dormitories for club members—men who had kept sober for three months and more, and who wore a star of a color denoting the variety of their achievements. On this floor, too, was a billiard, card, and smoking room, accessible to any one, even to outsiders, who had kept sober for three weeks. On the top floor of all were a few bedrooms, formerly those of Miss Smedley's servants, reserved for the occasional occupancy of such grandees as had preserved their integrity for three years and more; and here, too, was the sacred place known as "the lounge," to which none were admitted who didn't wear the gold or silver star representing sobriety for at least a year.

The whole was, therefore, a carefully arranged hierar-

chy in which one mounted according to one's merit. Little Spender wore the gold star, indicating a five years' fight with the devil; and Mouse, the cook, a blue one, which meant that he had been victorious for three months. All others in the club when Lovey and I arrived were outsiders like ourselves. Outsiders gave their word to stay a week, generally for the purpose of sobering up, but beyond that nothing was asked of them. At the beginning of the second week they could either continue their novitiate or go.

This information was given me by Spender as we stood on the threshold of the bath-room before I passed in. When the tale was ended, however, the Scotchman, who had taken little or no part in our reception, pushed by me and entered.

"You'll be wanting a shave," he said, in explanation of his rudeness. "There are my things"—he got down on all-fours to show me a safety razor and a broken cup containing a brush and shaving-soap, hidden behind one of the legs of the bath-tub—"and you'll oblige me by putting them back. Daisy, the wee bye you saw at the table, is doing the same by your chum. I make no doubt your own things have been held in your last rooming-house."

When I had admitted that this was exactly the case and had thanked my friends for their courtesies, they withdrew, leaving me to my toilet.

After the good meal the bath was a genuine luxury. It was a decent bath-room, kept by the men, as all the house was kept, in a kind of dingy cleanliness. Cleanliness, I found, was not only a principle of the club; it was one of the first indications that those who came in for shelter gave of a survival of self-respect. Some of

their efforts in that way were amusing or pathetic, as the case might be, but they were always human and touching.

While shaving I had an inspiration that was to have some effect on what happened to me afterward. I decided to let my mustache grow. As it grew strongly in any case, a four days' absence of the razor had given my upper lip a deep walnut tinge, and, should I leave the club after the week to which I had tacitly pledged myself by coming there at all, I should look different from when I entered. To look different was the first of the obscure and violent longings of which my heart was full. It would be the nearest possible thing to getting away from my old self. Not to be the same man at all as the one who had exchanged those few strange sentences with Regina Barry seemed to be the goal toward which I was willing to struggle at any cost of sacrifice.

Having bathed and shaved, I was not an ill-looking fellow till it came to putting on my shirt again. Any man who has worn a shirt for forty-eight hours in a city or on a train knows what a horror it becomes in the exposed spots on the chest and about the wrists. I had had but one shirt for a week and more—and but the one soft collar. You can see already, then, that in spite of some success in smartening up my damp and threadbare suit I left the bath-room looking abject.

I was not, however, so abject as Lovey when I found him again in the front sitting-room down-stairs.

In the back sitting-room our table companions were all arranged in a row against the wall. In spite of the fact that there were plenty of chairs, they sat huddled together on one bench; and though there was tobacco, as there were books, papers, and magazines, they sought no occupation. When I say that they could have smoked and

didn't, the wrench that had been given to their normal state of mind will be apparent. Close up to one another they pressed, the Scotchman against the piano-mover, and the piano-mover against the wee bye Daisy, like lovebirds on the perch of a cage or newly captured animals too terrified even to snap.

Without comment on any one's part, Lovey roamed the front sitting-room alone.

"I say, sonny," he began, fretfully, as I entered, "this ain't no place for you and me."

I tried to buck him up.

"Oh, well, it's only for a week. We can stand it for that long. They're very civil to us."

"But they're watchin' of us already like so many cats."

"Oh no, they're not. They're only kind."

"I don't want none o' that sort of kindness. What do ye think that two-foot-four of a Daisy says to me when 'e offered me the loan of 'is razor? 'Lovey,' says 'e, 'I'm goin' to 'elp ye to knock off the booze. It 'll be terr'ble hard work for an old man like you.' 'To 'ell with you!' says I. 'Ye ain't goin' to 'elp me to do no such thing, because knock it off is somethink I don't mean.' 'Well, what did you come in 'ere for?' says 'e. 'I come in 'ere,' I says to 'im, 'because my buddy come in 'ere; and wherever 'e goes I'll foller 'im.'"

"Then that's understood, Lovey," I said, cheerfully. "If I go at the end of the week, you go; and if I stay, you stay. We'll be fellas together."

He shook his head mournfully.

"If you go at the end of the week, sonny, I go, too; but if you stay—well, I don't know. I've been in jails, but I 'ain't never been in no such place as this—nobody

with no spunk. Look at 'em in there now—nothink but a bunch of simps."

"You won't leave me, Lovey?"

The extinct-blue eyes were raised to mine.

"No, sonny; I won't leave ye—not for 'ardly nothink."

CHAPTER IV

I DON'T know how we got the idea that before we went any farther we should be interviewed by Andy Christian, but I suppose somebody must have told us. We had heard of him, of course. He was, in fact, the master wizard whose incantations were wrecking our institutions. It was a surprise to us, therefore, to see, about nine o'clock, a brisk little elderly man blow in and blow past us—the metaphor is the most expressive I can use—with hardly more recognition than a nod.

"Hello, fellows!" he called out, as he passed through the hall and glanced in at Lovey and me in the sitting-room. "Hello, boys!" he said, casually, through the second door, to the other group, after which he went on his way to talk domestic matters with Mouse in the kitchen.

He seemed a mild-mannered man to have done all the diabolical work we had laid at his door. Neatly dressed in a summery black-and-white check, with a panama hat, he was like any other of the million business men who were on their way to New York offices that morning. It was only when he came back from the kitchen and was in conference with some of the men in the back parlor that I caught in him that look of dead and buried tragedy with which I was to grow so familiar in other members of the club. Superficially he was clean-shaven, round-featured, rubicund, and kindly, with a quirk about the

lips and a smile in his twinkling gray eyes that seemed always about to tell you the newest joke. His manner toward Lovey and me, when he came into the front sitting-room, was that of having known us all our lives and of resuming a conversation that only a few minutes before had been broken off.

"Let me see! Your name is—?"

He looked at Lovey as though he knew his name perfectly well, only that for the second it had slipped his memory.

Lovey went forward to the roll-top desk at which Mr. Christian had seated himself, and whispered, confidentially, "My name is Lovey, Your Honor."

The quirk about the lips seemed to execute a little caper.

"Is that your first name or your second?"

"It's my only name."

"You mean that you have another name, but you don't want to tell it?"

"I mean that if I 'ave another name it ain't nobody's business but mine."

The head of the club was now writing in a ledger, his eye following the movement of his pen.

"I see that you're a man of decided opinions."

"I am—begging Your Honor's parding," Lovey declared, with dignity.

"That 'll help you in the fight you're going to put up." Before Lovey could protest that he wasn't going to put up no fight the gentle voice went on, "And you seem like a respectable man, too."

"I'm as respectable as anybody else — at 'eart. I don't use bad langwidge, nor keep bad company, nor chew, nor spit tobacco juice over nothink, and I keeps myself to myself."

"All that 'll be a great help to you. What's been your occupation?"

"'Atter."

As our host was less used to the silent "h" than I, it became necessary for me to say, "Hatter, sir."

I suppose it was my voice. Christian looked up quickly, studying me with a long, kind, deep regard. Had I been walking two thousand years ago on the hills of Palestine and met Some One on the road, he might have looked at me like that.

The glance fell. Lovey's interrogation continued.

"And would you like that kind of job again—if we could get it for you—ultimately?"

"I don't want no job, Your Honor. I can look after myself. I didn't come in 'ere of my own free will—nor to pass the buck—nor nothink."

There was an inflection of surprise, perhaps of disapproval in the tone.

"You didn't come in here of your own free will? I think it's the first time that's been said in the history of the club. May I ask how it happened?"

I couldn't help thinking that I ought to intervene.

"He came in on my account, sir," I said, getting up and going forward to the desk. "He's trying to keep me straight."

"That is, he'll keep straight if you do?"

"That's it, sir, exactly."

He continued to write, speaking without looking up at us.

"Then I can't think of anything more to your credit, Mr.—Mr. Lovey—is that it?"

"I don't want no mister, Your Honor — not now I don't."

"When a man takes so fine a stand as you're taking toward this young fellow he's a mister to me. I respect him and treat him with respect. I see that we're meant to understand each other and get on together."

Poor Lovey had nothing to say. The prospect of temptation and fall being removed by his own heroism rendered him both proud and miserable at once.

When the writing was finished the kind eyes were again lifted toward me. Though the inspection was so mild, it pierced me through and through. It still seemed to cover me as he said: "You needn't tell me your real name if you don't want to—but in general we prefer it."

"I'll tell anything you ask me, sir. My name is Frank Melbury." In order to conceal nothing, I added, "As a matter of fact, it's Francis Worsley Melbury Melbury; but I use it in the shortened form I've given you."

"Thanks. You're English?"

"I'm a Canadian. My father is Sir Edward Melbury, of Montreal."

"Married?"

"No, sir. Single."

"And you have a profession?"

"Architect."

"Have you worked at that profession here in New York?"

I gave him the names of the offices in which from time to time I had found employment.

"And would you like to work at it again?"

"I should, sir."

"As a matter of fact, we have a number of architects, not exactly in the club, but friendly toward it, and on intimate terms with us. I'll introduce you to some of

them when—when you get on your feet. How old are you? Thirty?"

"Thirty-one."

For some two minutes he went on writing.

"How long since you've been drinking?"

"My last drink was three days ago."

"And how long since you've been actually drunk?"

"About a week."

"And before that?"

"It was pretty nearly all the time."

"It's a great advantage to you to come to us sober. It means that you know what you're doing and are to some extent counting the cost. Men will take any kind of vow when they're"—his glance traveled involuntarily to the back room—"when they're coming off a spree. The difficulty is to make them keep their promises when they've got over the worst of it. In your case—"

"I've got a motive, sir."

"Then so much the better."

I turned to Lovey.

"Lovey, would you mind stepping into the next room? There's something I want to speak about privately."

"If it's to let me in for worse, sonny—"

"No, it won't let you in for anything. It's only got to do with me."

"Then I don't pry into no secrets," he said, as he moved away reluctantly; "only, when fellas is buddies together—"

"I've a confession to make," I continued, when Lovey was out of earshot. "Last night I—"

"Hold on! Is it necessary for you to tell me this or not?"

I had to reflect.

"It's only necessary in that I want you to know the worst of me."

"But I'm not sure that we need to know that. It often happens that a man does better in keeping his secrets in his own soul and shouldering the full weight of their responsibility. Isn't it enough for us to know of you what we see?"

"I don't know that I can judge of that."

"Then tell me this: What you were going to say—is it anything for which you could be arrested?"

"It's nothing for which I shall be arrested."

"But it's an offense against the law?"

I nodded.

"And what renders you immune?"

"The fact that—that the person most concerned has—has forgiven it."

"Man or woman?"

"Woman."

His eyes wandered along the cornice as he thought the matter out. I saw then that they were wonderfully clear gray eyes, not so much beautiful as perfect—perfect in their finish as to edge and eyelash, but perfect most of all because of their expression of benignity.

"I don't believe I should give that away," he said, at last; "not now, at any rate. If you want to tell me later—" He changed the subject abruptly by saying, "Is that the only shirt you've got?"

I told him I had two or three clean ones in my trunk, but that that was held by my last landlord.

"How much did you owe him?"

I produced a soiled and crumpled bill. He looked it over.

"We'll send and pay the bill, and get your trunk."

The generosity almost took my breath away.

"Oh, but—"

"We should be only advancing the money," he explained; "and we should look to you to pay us back when you can. It's quite a usual procedure with us, because it happens in perhaps six of our cases out of ten. I don't have to point out to you," he continued, with a smile, "what I'm always obliged to underscore with chaps like those in there, that if you don't make good what we spend on your account the loss comes not on well-disposed charitable people who give of their abundance, but on poor men who steal from their own penury. The very breakfast you ate this morning was paid for in the main by fellows who are earning from twelve to twenty-five dollars a week, and have families to support besides."

I hung my head, trying to stammer out a promise of making good.

"You see those boys in there? There are five of them, and two will probably stick to us. That's about the proportion we keep permanently of all who come in. I don't know which two they will be—you never can tell. Perhaps it will be the piano-mover and the Scotchman; perhaps the man they call Headlights and the Irishman; perhaps the little chap and some other one of them. But whichever they are they'll chip in for the sake of the new ones we shall reclaim, and take on themselves the burden of the work."

The thought that for the comforts I had enjoyed that morning I was dependent on the sacrifice of men who had hardly enough for their own children made me redden with a shame I think he understood.

"Their generosity is wonderful," he went on, quietly;

"and I tell it to a man like you only because you can appreciate how wonderful it is. It's the fact that so much heart's blood goes into this work that makes it so living. These fellows love to give. They love to have you take the little they can offer. You never had a meal at your own father's table that was laid before you more ungrudgingly than the one you ate this morning. The men who provide it are doing humble work all over the city, all over the country—because we're scattered pretty far and wide. And every stroke of a hammer, and every stitch of a needle, and every tap on a typewriter, and every thrust of a shovel, and every dig of a pick, and every minute of the time by which they scrape together the pennies and the quarters and the dollars they send in to us is a prayer for you. I suppose you know what prayer really is?"

His glance was now that of inquiry.

"I'd like to have you tell me, sir," I answered, humbly.

He smiled again.

"Well, it isn't giving information to a wise and loving Father as to what He had better do for us. It's in trying to carry out the law of His being in doing things for others. That isn't all of it, by any means; but it's a starting-point. Spender tells me that that nice fellow Pyncheon brought you in. Well, then, every glass of soda-water Pyncheon draws is in its way a prayer for you, because the boy's heart is full of you. Prayer is action—only it's kind action."

"Thank you, sir," I said, with an effort to control the tremor of my voice; "I think I understand you."

"You yourself will be praying all through this week, in your very effort to buck up. You'll be praying in helping that poor man Lovey to do the same. In his

own purblind way—of course I understand his type and what you're trying to do for him—he'll be praying, too. Prayer is living—only, living in the right way." He said, suddenly, "I suppose you rather dread the week."

"Well, I do—rather—sir."

"Then I'll tell you what will make it easier—what will make it pass quickly and turn it into a splendid memory." He nodded again toward the back room. "Chum up with these fellows. You wouldn't, of course, be condescending to them—"

"It's for them to be condescending to me."

He surprised me by saying: "Perhaps it is. You know best. But here we try to get on a broad, simple, human footing in which we don't make comparisons. But you get what I mean. The simplest, kindliest approach is the best approach. Just make it a point to be white with them, as I'm sure they've been white with you."

I said I had never been more touched in my life than by the small kindnesses of the past two hours.

"That's the idea. If you keep on the watch to show the same sort of thing it will not only make the time pass, but it will brace you up mentally and spiritually. You see, they're only children. Fundamentally you're only a child yourself. We're all only children, Frank. Some one says that women grow up, but that men never do. Well, I don't know about women, but I've had a good deal to do with men—and I've never found anything but boys. Now you can spoil boys by too much indulgence, but you can't spoil them by too much love."

He stopped abruptly, because he saw what was happening to me.

The next thing I knew was his arm across my shoulders, which were shaking as if I was in convulsions.

"That's all right, old boy," I heard him whisper in my ear. "Just go up to the bath-room and lock the door and have it out. It 'll do you good. The fellows in there won't notice you, because lots of them go through the same thing themselves." Still with his arm across my shoulders he steered me toward the hall "There you are! You'll be better when you come down. We're just boys together, and there's nothing to be ashamed of. Only, when you see other fellows come in through the week—we have two or three new ones every day—you'll bear with them, won't you? And help them to take a brace."

He was still patting me tenderly on the back as with head bowed and shoulders heaving I began to stumble up-stairs.

CHAPTER V

MY acquaintance with Ralph Coningsby was the hinge on which my destiny turned. A hinge is a small thing as compared with a door, and so was my friendship with Coningsby in proportion to the rest of my life; but it became its cardinal point.

I met him first at the meeting of the club at which the Scotchman and the piano-mover presented themselves for membership. As to the five outsiders whom Lovey and I had found on arriving, Christian's prediction was verified. Three went out when their week was over and they had got sobered up. Two stayed behind to go on with the work of reform. At the end of another week each stood up with his next friend, as a bridegroom with his best man, and asked to be taken into fellowship.

That was at the great weekly gathering, which took place every Saturday night. Among the hundred and fifty-odd men who had assembled in the two down-stairs sitting-rooms it was not difficult to single out Coningsby, since he was the only man I could see in whom there was nothing blasted or scorched or tragic. There was another there of whom this was true, but I didn't meet him till toward the end of the evening.

I had now been some ten days within the four walls of the club, not sobering up, as you know, but trying to find myself. The figure of speech is a good one, for the real Frank Melbury seemed to have been lost. This other

self, this self I was anxious to get rid of, had left him in some bright and relatively innocent world, while it went roaming through a land of sand and thorns. I had distinctly the feeling of being in search of my genuine identity.

For this I sat through long hours of every day doing absolutely nothing—that is, it was absolutely nothing so far as the eye could see; but inwardly the spirit was busy. I came, too, to understand that that was the secret of the long, stupefied forenoons and afternoons on the part of my companions. They were stupefied only because sight couldn't follow the activity of their occupation. Beyond the senses so easily staggered by strong drink there was a man endeavoring to come forth and claim his own. In far, subliminal, unexplored regions of the personality that man was forever at work. I could see him at work. He was at work when the flesh had reached the end of its short tether, and reeled back from its brief and helpless efforts to enjoy. He was at work when the sore and sodden body could do nothing but sit in lumbering idleness. He was at work when the glazed eye could hardly lift its stare from a spot on the floor.

That was why tobacco no longer afforded solace, nor reading distraction, nor an exchange of anecdotes mental relaxation. I don't mean to say that we indulged in none of these pastimes, but we indulged in them slightly. On the one hand, they were pale in comparison with the raw excitement our appetites craved; and on the other, they offered nothing to the spirit which was, so to speak, aching and clamorous. Apart from the satisfaction we got from sure and regular food and sleep, our nearest approach to comfort was in a kind of silent, tactual clinging together. None of us wanted to be really alone. We

could sit for hours without exchanging more than a casual word or two, when it frightened us to have no one else in the room. The sheer promiscuity of bed against bed enabled us to sleep without nightmares.

The task of chumming up had, therefore, been an easy one. So little was demanded. When a new-comer had been shown the ropes of the house there was not much more to do for him. One could only silently help him to find his lost identity as one was finding one's own.

"That's about all there is to it," Andrew Christian observed when I had said something of the sort to him. "You can't push a man into the kingdom of heaven; he's got to climb up to it of his own accord. There's no salvation except what one works out through one's own sweat and blood." He gave me one of his quick, semi-humorous glances. "I suppose you know what salvation is?"

I replied that I had heard a great deal about it all my life, but I was far from sure of what it entailed in either effort or accomplishment.

"Salvation is being normal. The intuitive old guys who coined language saw that plainly enough when they connected the idea with health. Fundamentally health is salvation and salvation is health—only perfect health, health not only of the body, but of the mind. Did it ever strike you that health and holiness and wholeness are all one word?"

I said it never had.

"Well, it's worth thinking about. There's a lot in it. You'll get a lot out of it. The holy man is not the hermit on his knees in the desert, or the saint in colored glass, or anything that we make to correspond to them. He's the fellow who's whole—who's sound in wind and limb and intelligence and sympathy and everything that makes

power. When we say, 'O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,' we mean, O worship the Lord in the beauty of the all-round man, who's developed in every direction, and whose degree of holiness is just in proportion to that development."

"That's a big thought, sir," I said. "I don't believe many people who speak the English language ever get hold of it. But how does it happen that one of the two words is spelt with a 'w,' while the other—"

He laughed, showing two rows of small, regular white teeth, as pretty as a girl's.

"That was another lot of intuitive guys; and a very neat trick they played on us. They saw that once the Anglo-Saxon, with his fine, big sporting instinct, got hold of the idea that holiness meant spreading out and living out in all manly directions—and by that I don't mean giving free rein to one's appetites, of course—but they saw that once the idea became plain to us the triumph of lust would be lost. So they inserted that little bluffing, blinding 'w,' which doesn't belong there at all, to put us off the scent; and off the scent we went. Church and state and human society have all combined to make holiness one of the most anemic, flat-chested words in the language, when it's really a synonym of normality."

We exchanged these thoughts in the narrow hall of the club, as he happened to be passing, and stopped for a few words. It was always his way. He never treated us to long and formal interviews. From a handclasp and a few chance sentences we got the secret of a personality which gave out its light and heat like radium, without effort and without exhaustion.

"What do yer think 'e says to me?" Lovey demanded of me one day. "'Lovey,' says 'e, 'yer've got a terr'ble

responsibility on ye with that young fella, Slim. If you go under 'e goes under, and if you keep straight 'e keeps straight.' What do yer think of that?"

"I think you're doing an awful lot for me, Lovey."

He slapped his leg.

"Ye got that number right, old son. There's nobody else in the world I'd 'a' done it for. If you 'adn't taken a fancy to me, like, that night, and arsked me to go 'ome with you— But, say, Slim," he went on, confidentially, "wouldn't you like to 'ave a drink?"

Wouldn't I like to have a drink? There was thirst in the very rustle of Lovey's throat. There was the same thirst in my own. It was more than a thirst of the appetite—it was a thirst of the being, of whatever had become myself. It was one of the moments at which the lost identity seemed farther away than ever, and the Frank Melbury of the last three years the man in possession.

I couldn't, however, let Lovey see that.

"Oh, one gets used to going without drinks."

"Do ye? I don't. I'd take a drink of 'air-oil if anybody'd give me one. I'd take a drink of ink. Anything that comes out of a bottle 'd be better 'n nothink, after all this water from a jug."

During the first few days at the club this was my usual state, not of mind, but of sensation. During the next few days I passed into a condition that I can best express as one of physical resignation. The craving for drink was not less insistent, but it was more easily denied. Since I couldn't get it I could do without it, and not want to dash my head against a stone. But after the words with Andrew Christian I have just recorded I began to feel—oh, ever so slightly!—that Nature had a realm of freedom

and vigor in which there was no need of extraordinary stimulants, and of which sunshine, air, and water might be taken as the symbols. With the resting of my over-excited nerves and the response of a body radically healthy to regular sleep and simple food, I began to feel, at least at intervals, that water, air, and sunshine were the natural elements to thrive on.

My first glance at Ralph Coningsby showed me a man who had thriven on them. He was the type to whom most of us take at sight—the clean, fresh, Anglo-Saxon type, blue-eyed and fair, whom you couldn't do anything but trust.

"God! how I should like to look like that!" I said to myself the minute I saw him come in.

I knew by this time that at the big weekly meetings there were sometimes friendly visitors whose touch with the club was more or less accidental. I had no difficulty in putting this man down as one. He entered as if he were at any ordinary gathering of friends, with a nod here, a handshake there, and a few words with some one else. Then for a minute he stood, letting his eyes search the room till they rested on me, where I stood in a corner of the front sitting-room.

There was at once that livening of the glance that showed he had found what he was looking for. Making his way through the groups that were standing about, he came up and offered his hand.

"Your name's Melbury, isn't it? Mine's Coningsby. I think you must be the same Melbury who went to the Beaux Arts in the fall of the year in which I left in the spring."

"Oh, you're that Coningsby? You used to know Bully Harris?"

"Rather! He and I lived together for a year in the Rue de Seine."

"And he and I spent a year in the same house in the Rue Bonaparte."

"And now he's out in Red Wing, Minnesota, doing very well, I hear."

"The last time I saw him was in London. We dined together at the Piccadilly and did a theater."

"And Tommy Runt? Do you ever hear of him?"

"Not since he went back to Melbourne; but that chap he was always about with—Saunderson, wasn't it?—he was killed in a motor accident near Glasgow."

"So I heard. Some one told me—Pickman, I think it was—an Englishman—but you didn't know Pickman, did you? He left the year I came, which must have been three or four years before your time. By the way, why don't we sit down?"

In the process of sitting down I remembered my manners.

"Mr. Coningsby, won't you let me introduce you to my friend, Mr. Lovey?"

Lovey was seated, nursing a knee and looking as wretched as a dog to whom no one is paying the customary attention. He resented Coningsby's appearance; he resented a kind of talk which put me beyond his reach.

When Coningsby, who seated himself between us, had shaken hands and made some kindly observation, Lovey replied, peevishly:

"I ain't in 'ere for nothink but to save Slim."

"That's what the boys call me," I laughed, in explanation.

Coningsby having duly commended this piece of self-sacrifice, we went on with the reminiscences with which

we had begun. It was the most ordinary kind of breaking the ice between one man and another; but for me the wonder of it was precisely in that fact. You have to be down and out to know what it means when some one treats you as if you had never been anything but up and in. There was not a shade in Coningsby's manner, nor an inflection in his tone, to hint at the fact that we hadn't met at the New Netherlands or any other first-class club. It was nothing, you will say, but what any gentleman would be impelled to. Quite true! But again let me say it, you would have to be in my place to know what it means to be face to face with the man who is impelled to it.

We stopped talking, of course, when business began, Coningsby giving me any necessary explanations in an undertone, and pointing out the notables whom I didn't already know by sight.

One of these was Colonel Straight, who with Andrew Christian had founded the club. I don't believe that he had ever been a colonel, but he looked like one; neither can I swear that his real name was Straight, though it suited him. In our world the sobriquet often clings closer to us, and fits us more exactly, than anything given by inheritance or baptism. Here was a man with a figure as straight as an arrow and a glance as straight as a sunbeam. What else could his name have been? With one leg slightly shorter than the other, as if he had been wounded in battle, a magnificent white mustache, a magnificent fleece of white hair—he had all the air not only of an old soldier, but of an old soldier in high command.

"You wouldn't think, to look at him," Coningsby whispered, "that he's only an old salesman for ready-made clothes."

"No; he ought to be at the head of a regiment."

"But the odd thing I notice about this club is that a man's status and occupation in the world outside seem to fall away from him as soon as he passes the door. They become irrelevant. The only thing that counts is what he is as a man; and even that doesn't count for everything."

"What does count for everything?" I asked, in some curiosity.

"That he's a man at all."

"That's it exactly," I agreed, heartily. "I hadn't put it to myself in that way; but I see that it's what I've been conscious of."

"As an instance of that you can take the friendship between Straight and Christian. From the point of view of the outside world they're of types so diverse that you'd say that the difference precluded friendship of any kind. You know what Christian is; but the colonel is hardly what you'd call a man of education. Without being illiterate, he makes elementary grammatical mistakes, and unusual ideas floor him. But to say that he and Christian are like brothers hardly expresses it."

I pondered on this as the meeting, with Christian in the chair, came to order and the routine of business began.

When it grew uninteresting to people with no share in the management of the club I got an opportunity to whisper, "You settled in New York?"

"I'm with Sterling Barry; the junior of the four partners."

The reply seemed to strip from me the few rags of respectability with which I had been trying to cover myself up. Had he gone on to say, "And I saw you break into his house and steal his daughter's trinkets," I should scarcely have felt myself more pitilessly exposed.

It was perhaps a proof of what the club had done for me that I no longer regarded this crime with the same sang-froid as when I entered. Even on the morning of my first talk with Andrew Christian I could have confessed it more or less as I should have owned to a solecism in etiquette. During the intervening ten days, however, I had so far reverted to my former better self that the knowledge that I was the man who had crept into a house and begun to rob it filled me with dismay.

I had to pretend that I didn't want to interrupt the conducting of business to conceal the fact that I was unable to reply.

"You've worked in New York, too?" he began again, when there was a chance of speaking.

I had by this time so far recovered myself as to be able to tell him the names of my various employers. I didn't add that they had fired me one after another because of my drinking-spells, since I supposed he would take that for granted.

"Ever thought of Barry's?"

"I brought a letter of introduction to him from McArdle, of Montreal; but I never presented it."

"Pity."

"Yes, perhaps it was. But you see I didn't like McArdle's work, though I studied under him. As I was afraid of getting into the same old rut, I went to Pritchard."

"What do you think of Barry's things now?"

"Oh, I like them—though they're not so severe as I should go in for myself. The modern French is a little too florid, and he goes them one better."

"Just my feeling. I should like you to see a bit of work I've been doing on my own; rather a big order—

for me, that is—in which I've had to be as American as the deuce, and yet keep to the best lines."

"Like to," I managed to whisper back as we heard Christian announce that two new men were now to be admitted to the club.

I was interested in the ceremony, having by this time got on friendly terms with both the piano-mover and the Scotchman, and learned something of their history. With necessary divergences the general trend of these tales was the same. Both were married men, both had children, in both cases "the home was broken up"—the phrase had become classic in the club; though in the one instance the wife had taken the children to her own people, and in the other she was doing her best to support them herself.

Their names being called, there was a scraping of chairs, after which the two men lumbered forward, each accompanied by his next friend. The office of next friend, as I came to learn, was one of such responsibility as to put a strain on anything like next friendship. The Scotchman's next friend was a barber, who, as part of his return for the club's benefits to himself, had that afternoon cut the hair of all of us inmates—nineteen in number; while the piano-mover had as his sponsor the famous Beady Lamont. The latter pair moved forward like two elephants, their tread shaking the floor.

I shall not describe this initiation further than to say that everything about it was simple, direct, and impressive. The four men being lined in front of Mr. Christian's desk, the spokesman for the authorities was old Colonel Straight.

"The difference between this club and every other club," he said, in substance, "is that men goes to other

clubs to amuse theirselves, and here they come to fight. This club is an army. Any one who joins it joins a corps. You two men who wants to come in with us 'ave got to remember that up to now you've been on your own and independent; and now you'll be entering a company. Up to now, if you worked you worked for yourself; if you loafed you loafed for yourself; if you was lounge lizards you was lounge lizards on your own account and no one else's; and if you got drunk no one but you—leaving out your wife and children; though why I leave them out God alone knows!—but if you got drunk no one but you had to suffer. Now it's going to be all different. You can't get drunk without hurting us, and we can't get drunk without hurting you. T'other way round—every bit of fight we put up helps you, and every bit of fight you put up helps us.

"Now there's lots of things I could say to you this evening; but the only one I want to jam right home is this: You and us look at this thing from different points of view. You come here hoping that we're going to help you to keep straight. That's all right. So we are; and we'll all be on the job from this night forward. You won't find us taking no vacation, and your next friends here 'll worry you like your own consciences. They'll never leave you alone the minute you ain't safe. You'll hear 'em promise to hunt for you if you go astray, and go down into the ditch with you and pull you out. There'll be no dive so deep that they won't go after you, and no kicks and curses that you can give 'em that they won't stand in order to haul you back. That's all gospel true, as you're going to find out if you go back on your promises. But that ain't the way the rest of us—the hundred and fifty of us that you see here to-night—looks at it at all.

What we see ain't two men we're tumbling over each other to help; we see two men that's coming to help us. And, oh, men, you'd better believe that we need your help! You look round and you see this elegant house—and the beds—and the grub—and everything decent and reg'lar—and you think how swell we've got ourselves fixed. But I tell you, men, we're fighting for our life—the whole hundred and fifty of us! And another hundred and fifty that ain't here! And another hundred and fifty that's scattered to the four winds of the earth; we're fighting for our life; we're fighting with our back against the wall. We ain't out of danger because we've been a year or two years or five years in the club. We're never out of danger. We need every ounce of support that any one can bring to us; and here you fellows come bringing it! You're bringing it, Colin MacPherson, and you're bringing it, Tapley Toms; and there ain't a guy among us that isn't glad and grateful. If you go back on your own better selves you go back on us first of all; and if either of you falls, you leave each one of us so much the weaker."

That, with a funny story or two, was the gist of it; but delivered in a low, richly vibrating voice, audible in every corner of the room and addressed directly and earnestly to the two candidates, its effect was not unlike that of Whitfield's dying man preaching to dying men. All the scarred, haunted faces, behind each of which there lurked memories blacker than those of the madhouse, were turned toward the speaker raptly. Knowledge of their own hearts and knowledge of his gave the words a power and a value beyond anything they carried on the surface. The red-hot experience of a hundred and fifty men was poured molten into the minute, to give to the promises

the two postulants were presently called on to make a kind of iron vigor.

Those promises were simple. Colin MacPherson and Tapley Toms took the total-abstinence pledge for a week, after which they would be asked to renew it for similar periods till they felt strong enough to take it for a month. They would remain as residents of the club till morally re-established, but they would look for work, in which the club would assist them, and send at least three-quarters of their earnings to their wives. As soon as they were strong enough they would set up homes for their families again, and try to atone for their failure in the mean time. They would do their best to strengthen other members of the club, and to live in peace with them. The religious question was shelved by asking each man to give his word to reconnect himself with the church in which he had been brought up.

The promises exacted of the next friends were, as became veterans, more severe. They were to be guardians of the most zealous activity, and shrink from no insult or injury in the exercise of their functions. If their charges fell irretrievably away, their brothers in the club would be sorry for them, even though the guilt would not be laid at their door.

When some twenty or thirty members had renewed their vows for a third or fourth or fifth week, as the case happened to be, the meeting broke up for refreshments.

It was during this finale to the evening that Coningsby brought up a man somewhat of his own type, and yet different. He was different in that, though of the same rank and age, he was tall and dark, and carried himself with a slight stoop of the shoulders. An olive complexion touched off with well-rounded black eyebrows and a neat

black mustache made one take him at first for a foreigner, while the dreaminess of the dark eyes was melancholy and introspective, if not quite despondent.

"Melbury, I want you to know Doctor Cantyre, who holds the honorable office of physician in ordinary to the club."

Once more I was in conversation with a man of antecedents similar to my own, and once more the breaking of the ice was that between men accustomed to the same order of associations. In this case we found them in Cantyre's tourist recollections of Montreal and Quebec, and his enjoyment of winter sports.

CHAPTER VI

THERE was nothing more than this to the meeting that night, but early the next afternoon I was called to the telephone. As such a summons was rare in the club, I went to the instrument in some trepidation.

"Hello! This is Frank Melbury."

"This is Doctor Cantyre. You remember that we met last evening?"

"Oh, rather!"

"I'm motoring out in my runabout to see a patient who lives a few miles up the river, and I want you to come along."

The invitation, which would mean nothing to you but a yes or a no, struck me almost speechless. There was first the pleasure of it. I have not laid stress on the fact that the weather was sickeningly hot, because it didn't enter into our considerations. We were too deeply concerned with other things to care much that the house was stifling; and yet stifling it was. But more important than that was the fact that any one in the world should want to show me this courtesy. Remember that I had been beyond the reach of courtesies. A drink from some one who would expect me to give him a drink in return was the utmost I had known in this direction for months, and I might say for years.

Is it any wonder that in my reply I stammered and stuttered and nearly sobbed?

"Oh, but, I say, I—I look too beastly for an expedition of—of that sort. I'm awfully sorry, but—but I—well, you know how it is."

"Oh, get out! You've got to have the air. I'm your doctor. I'm not going to see you cooped up there day after day in weather like this. Besides, I'm bringing along a couple of dust-coats—the roads will be dusty part of the way—and we shall both be covered up. Expect me by half past two."

As he put up the receiver without waiting for further protests, there was nothing for me but submission.

"I've been 'ere as long as you 'ave," Lovey complained when I told him of my invitation, "and nobody don't ask me to go hout in no automobiles."

"Oh, but they will."

He shook his head.

"Them swells 'll take you away, sonny. See if they don't."

"Not from you, Lovey."

He grabbed me by the arm.

"Will you promise me that, Slim?"

"Yes, Lovey; I promise you."

"And we'll go on being buddies, even when the rich guys talks to you about all them swell things?"

"Yes, Lovey. We're buddies for life."

With this Mizpah between us he released my arm and I was able to go and make my preparations.

In spite of the heat and the fact that on a windless day there was no dust to speak of, Cantyre was buttoned up in a dust-coat. It would have seemed the last word in tact if he hadn't gone further by pretending to be occupied in doing something to the steering-wheel while I hid my seedy blue serge in the long linen garment he

handed me out. As even an old golf-cap can look pretty decent, I was really like anybody else by the time I had snuggled myself in by his side.

During the first mile or two of the way I could hardly listen to Cantyre, to say nothing of making conversation. In spasmodic sentences between his spells of attention to the traffic he told me of his patient and where she lived; but as it was nothing I was obliged to register in my mind, I could give myself to the wonder of the occasion, in awe at the miracle which had restored me to something like my old place in the world at the very moment when I seemed farthest away from it. Here I was, with not a penny to my name and not two coats to my back, tooling along like a gentleman with a gentleman, and as a man with his friend. Moreover, here I was with a new revelation, a convincing revelation, of something I had long since ceased to believe—that in this world there was such a thing as active brotherly kindness.

I came out of these thoughts to find that we were following the avenue with part of which I had made myself so familiar ten days before. I began to ask myself if Cantyre had a motive in bringing me this way. The houses were thinning out. Vacant lots became frequent. I noted the southern limit of my pacings up and down on that strange midnight. Cantyre slowed the pace perceptibly. My heart thumped. If he accused me of anything, I was resolved to confess all.

As we passed one particular vacant lot, a tangle of nettle, fireweed, and blue succory, I noticed that Cantyre's gaze roamed round about it, to the neglect of the machine. We had slowed down to perhaps ten miles an hour.

"Do you know whose house that is?" he asked, suddenly.

But I refused to betray myself before it was necessary.

"Whose?" I riposted.

"Sterling Barry, the architect's."

The machine almost stopped. He looked the façade up and down, saying, as he did so: "It's closed for the season. They left town a few days ago. Barry's bought the old Hornblower place at Rosyth, Long Island."

To my relief, we sped on again; but I was not long in learning the motive behind his interest.

Chiefly for the sake of not seeming dumb, I said, as we got into the country, "You and Ralph Coningsby are by way of being great friends, aren't you?"

"No," he replied, promptly. "I see him when I go to the club; not very often elsewhere. I know his sister, Elsie Coningsby, better. Not that I know her very well. She happens to be a great friend of—of a—of a great friend—or, rather, some one who was a great friend—of mine. That's all."

So that was it!

I said, after we had spun along some few miles more, "Your name is Stephen, isn't it?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

I hedged. "Oh, I must have heard some one call you that."

"That's funny. Hardly any one does. They mostly say Cantyre—or just doctor." He added, after a minute or two, "You call me Stephen, and I'll call you Frank."

Once more the swift march of happenings gave me a slight shock.

"Oh, but we hardly know each other."

"That would be true if there weren't friendships that outdistance acquaintanceships."

"Oh, if you look at it that way—"

"That's the way it strikes me."

"But, good Heavens! man, think of what—of what I am!"

His gaze was fixed on the stretch of road ahead of him.

"What's that got to do with it? It wouldn't make any difference to me if you were a murderer or a thief."

"How do you know I'm not?" I couldn't help asking.

"I don't know that you're not; but I say it wouldn't make any difference to me if you were."

The word I am tempted to use of myself at this unexpected offer of good-will is flabbergasted. I am not emotional; still less am I sentimental; both in sentiment and emotion my tendency is to go slow.

After a brief silence I said: "Look here! Do you go round making friends among the riffraff of mankind?"

"I don't go round making friends among people of any sort. I'm not the friendly type. I know lots of people, of course; but — but I don't get beyond just knowing them."

"Is that because you don't want to?"

"Not altogether. I'm a—I'm a lonesome sort of bloke. I never was a good mixer; and when you're not that, other fellows instinctively close up their ranks against you and shut you out. Not that that matters to me. I hardly ever see a lot with whom I should want to get in. You're—you're an exception."

"And for Heaven's sake, why?"

"Oh, for two or three reasons—which I'm not going to tell you. One of these days you may find out."

We left the subject there and sped along in silence.

This, then, was the man Regina Barry had turned

down; and, notwithstanding his kindness to myself, I could understand her doing it. For a high-spirited girl such as she evidently was he would have been too melancholy. "Very nice" was what she had called him, and very nice he was; but he lacked the something thoroughly masculine that means more to women than to men. Men are used to the eternal-feminine streak in themselves and one another; but women put up with it only when it is like a flaw in an emerald, noticeable to the expert, but to no one else.

I asked him how he came to be what Coningsby called physician in ordinary to the club.

"By accident. Rufus Legrand asked me to go over and see what I could do for a bad case of D. T."

"He's the rector of the church opposite, isn't he?"

"Yes, and an awfully good sort. Only parson I know who thinks more of God than he does of a church. I shouldn't be surprised if one of these days he got the true spirit of religion."

"What's that?"

"What they're doing at the Down and Out."

"Oh, but they skip religion there altogether."

"They don't skip religion; they only skip the word—and for a reason."

"What reason?"

"The reason that it's been so misapplied as to have become nearly unintelligible. If you told the men at the club that such and such a thing was religion they'd most of 'em kick like the deuce; but when they get the thing without explanation they take to it every time. But you were asking me about my connection with the club. It began four years ago, when they first got into Miss Smedley's house. Fellow had the old-fashioned

horrors—bad. As I'd been making dipsomania a specialty Legrand railroaded me in, and there I've stayed."

When we drew up at the gate of an old yellow mansion standing in large grounds Cantyre left me in the machine while he went in to visit his patient. The blue-green hills were just beginning to veil themselves in the diaphanous mauve of afternoon, and between them the river with its varied life flowed silently and rapidly. It was strange to me to remember that a short time ago I had been wishing myself under it, and that this very water would be washing the oozy, moss-grown piles of Greeley's Slip.

CHAPTER VII

NO later than that evening my life took still another step.

A little before nine, just as I was about to go to bed—our hours at the club were early—Ralph Coningsby dropped in for a word with me. I happened to be at the foot of the stairs in the hall when Spender admitted him, and he refused to come farther inside.

"Been dining with my wife's father and mother over the way," he said, in explanation of his dinner jacket and black tie, "and just ran across to say something while I was in the neighborhood. You said last night you'd come and see the Grace Memorial with me."

"If you say so," I smiled, "I suppose I must have; but it's the first time to my knowledge that I ever heard of it."

"Oh, that's the bit of work I told you about—the thing I'm doing on my own. It's over here at St. David's. You see, when Charlie Grace died he left a sum of money to build and endow this institution in memory of his father."

I smiled again.

"I know I must have heard the name of Charlie Grace, but it seems to have slipped my memory. All the same—"

"I'll tell you about him to-morrow. I merely want to say now that I'll look in about ten in the morning, and take you across the street—"

The difficulty I had had to confront in the afternoon was before me again.

"I don't know about that, Coningsby. The fact is I'm not— Well, hang it all! Can't you see? I haven't a rag in the world but what I stand up in, and I can't go where I'm likely to run into decent people."

"You won't run into any one but carpenters and painters. I'm not going to take no for an answer, old chap. Besides, there's method in this madness, for—now don't buck!—for I'm going to put you on a job."

I could only stare vacantly.

"On a job?"

"Mrs. Grace wants some measurements and specifications which she thinks I haven't given her exactly enough; and the first thing to be done is to go over the whole blooming place with a foot-rule and a tape-measure; but I'll tell you about that to-morrow, too. For a chap with your training it will be office-boy's work; but as you're doing nothing else for the moment—"

It is needless to say that I hardly slept that night. It was not the prospect of work alone that excited me; it was that of being gradually drawn into the sphere in which I might meet Regina Barry. I was still uncertain as to whether I wanted to do that or not. There was no hour of the day when I didn't think of her, and yet it was always with a sense of thankfulness that she couldn't know where I was or guess at what had become of me. If I could have been granted the privilege of seeing her without having her see me I should have jumped at it; but the ordeal of her recognition was beyond my strength to face. Rather than have her say with her eyes, "You were the man who came into my room and tried to rob me," I would have shot myself.

And yet I had to admit the fact that this danger was in the air. Ralph Coningsby's sister was the Elsie of that tragic night; Cantyre was the Stephen. I was being offered work by Sterling Barry's partner, and might soon be doing it for Sterling Barry himself. The fatality that brought about these unfoldings might go farther still, and before I knew it I might find myself in the precise situation that filled me with terror—and yet made me shiver with a kind of harsh delight. Before I could sleep I had to make a compromise with my courage. I would not shoot myself rather than meet her. I would meet her first, if it had to be. I would take that one draft of the joy I had put forever out of reach—and shoot myself afterward.

But in the morning I was more self-confident. Having examined myself carefully in the cracked mirror in the bath-room, I found that my mustache, which had grown tolerably long and thick, changed my appearance not a little. Moreover, food, rest, and sobriety had smoothed away the unspeakable haggardness that had creased my forehead, hardened my mouth, and burnt into my eyes that woebegone desolation which I had noticed among my companions when I arrived at the club. It is no exaggeration to say that I was not only younger by ten years, but that I was changed in looks, as a landscape is changed when, after being swept by rains, it is bathed in sunshine. The one hope I built on all this was that, were I to meet Regina Barry face to face, she would not recognize me at a first glance, while I could keep her from getting a second.

On the way across the street Coningsby told me something of Charlie Grace and his memorial. He had been the son of a former rector of St. David's—an important

man in the New York of his day, who had outlived his usefulness and been asked to resign his parish. The son had never forgiven this slight, and the William Grace Memorial was intended to avenge it. It had been the express desire of the widow, Mrs. Charlie Grace, that he, Ralph Coningsby, should have sole charge of the building, and the work had been going on since the previous autumn. In the coming autumn the house would be ready for furnishing. It was for this purpose that Mrs. Grace required the exact measurements of each room, with the disposition of the wall spaces. During the summer she could thus consider what she would have to do when the time came in October.

Only a corner of the new building was visible from Vandiver Street, the main entrance being on Blankney Place, which was a parallel thoroughfare. Standing in the middle of the grass-plot in front of the dumpy, spurious 1840 Gothic rectory, we had the length of the dumpy, spurious 1840 Gothic church in front of us. The memorial had to be fitted in behind the chancel, on the space formerly occupied by a Sunday-school room. This space had been enlarged by the purchase of the lot in Blankney Place, giving an entry from a more populous neighborhood. The purpose of the memorial had been more or less dictated by Mrs. Ralph Coningsby, who, as Esther Legrand, the rector's daughter, had from her childhood upward worked among the people round about and knew their needs. As far as I could gather, it was to be a sort of neighborhood club, with parlors, reading-rooms, playing-rooms, a dancing-room, a smoking-room, a billiard-room, a lecture-room, a gymnasium, baths, and so on, and open to those who were properly enrolled, of both sexes and all ages. Of the committee in charge

Mrs. Coningsby was apparently the moving spirit, though Mrs. Grace was reserving to herself the pleasure of fitting the house up.

Before going inside we discussed the difficulties of harmonizing a modern building with the efforts of the early nineteenth century, and I had an opportunity to commend Coningsby's judgment. He had kept to the brownstone of the church and rectory, and had suggested their spirit while working on sober, well-proportioned lines.

In the middle of this I broke off to say: "Look here, old chap! I hope you're not inventing this job of yours just for the sake of giving me something to do."

His frank gaze convinced me.

"Honest, I'm not. Mrs. Grace is particularly anxious to have the measurements sent down to her at Rosyth, and we're so short-handed—"

"Then that's all right. Let's go in, and you can show me what I'm to do."

As Coningsby had said, it was office-boy's work, but it suited me. It was a matter of getting broken in again, and—whether it came by accident or my friend's good-heartedness—an easy job in which there was no thinking or responsibility was the most effective means that could have been found of nursing me along. At the end of a week I was treated to the well-nigh incredible wonder of a check.

Early on a Sunday morning I took it to Christian, asking that it should be turned in toward my expenses at the club.

Having read its amount, he held it in his fingers, twisting it and turning it.

"You see, Frank," he said, after thinking for a minute,

"the primary object of the club is not to be paid for what it spends—though that is an object—it's to help fellows to get on their feet. Of you nineteen chaps who are in the house at present twelve are regularly paying for their board and lodging, and that pretty well carries us along. If there's a deficit it's covered by the back payments of men who've gone out and who are making up. So that this isn't pressing for the minute—"

"But I should like to pay it, sir."

"Yes, of course; but it's a question of what is most urgent. Now this isn't urgent; we can extend your credit; whereas, the first bit of bluff we've all got to put up when we're pulling ourselves together is in clothes."

He asked me how long my present job would go on. I said for about three weeks.

"Then keep this check," he pursued, handing it back to me, "till you get as much again. That will be enough to turn you out quite smart. Go to Straight, at Bruch Brothers—all our fellows go to him—and he'll advise you to the best advantage."

The words were accompanied by such a smile that I, who am not emotional, felt my eyes smart.

CHAPTER VIII

THE summer passed with no more than two or three other incidents worth the jotting down.

In the first place, the day arrived when I had to make up my mind either to leave the club or to join it. Expecting some opposition from Lovey as to joining it, I was surprised to find him take the suggestion complacently.

"I've found out," he whispered to me, "that yer can jine this club—and fall. Yer can fall three times before they'll turn ye out."

"Oh, but you wouldn't want to fall in cold blood."

"Well," he muttered, doubtfully, "I ain't partic'lar about the blood. Now my hadvice 'd be this: 'Ere we are in July. That's all right; we can jine. Then in Haugust we can 'ave a wee little bit of a fall—just two or three days like. We can do the same in September; and the same in Hoctober. That 'll use up our three times, and we can come back under cover for the worst months of the winter. We can't fall no more after that; but in the spring we can try somethink else. There's always things."

"And suppose I don't mean to fall?"

He looked hurt.

"Oh, if you can keep straight without me—"

"But if I can't, Lovey? If I must keep straight and need you to help me?"

He clasped his hands against his stomach and drew a dismal face.

"That 'd be a tight place for me."

"And isn't there," I continued, "another point of view? Suppose we did what you suggest, do you think it would be treating all these nice fellows decently?"

"Oh, if you're going to start out treatin' people decent—"

"Well, why shouldn't we? We can do it—you and I together."

He drew a deep sigh.

"I must say, Slim, yer do beat everythink for puttin' things on me."

But in the end we were both admitted at one of the Saturday-evening meetings with, as usual, a large gathering of friends, and some bracing words from Straight. Pyn stood up with me as next friend, and little Spender did the same by Lovey. I have not said that during the ten days before I went to work Pyn blew in at the club during some minutes of every lunch hour to watch my progress. It was he, too, who found Lovey the job of washing windows, by which that worthy also had a chance of returning to honest ways. Indeed, though I cannot repeat it frequently enough, of the many hands stretched out to help me upward none was stronger in its grasp than that of the kindly keeper of the soda-water fountain to whom the club had given a veritable new birth.

Our admission as members had taken place while I was still doing the measurements at the memorial. By the time they were finished Coningsby had a new proposal. As it was the middle of July, he was anxious to take his wife and two little children to the country for a month. Carpenters, plasterers, painters, and plumbers were still at

work on the building, and they couldn't be left without oversight. Would I undertake to give that—at a reasonable salary?

I had grown familiar with the work by this time, and had been able to throw into the furtherance of Coningsby's plans an enthusiasm largely sprung of gratitude. In addition I was getting back my self-confidence in proportion as I got back my self-respect. The fact, too, that in the new summer suit and straw hat to which the colonel's advice had helped me I could go about the streets without being ashamed of myself did something to restore my natural poise.

I could see that by taking this work I should really be helping Coningsby. He needed the rest; his wife and babies undoubtedly needed the change. It was not easy for a man with so important a piece of work as this on hand to get any one satisfactorily to take his place. I could accept the offer, then, without the suspicion—which any man would hate—that it was being made to me from motives of philanthropy. I was really being useful—more useful than in taking the measurements for Mrs. Grace, which any novice could have done—and making a creditable living for the first time in years.

Then, too, I had a great deal of Cantyre's company. He spent most of the summer in town; chiefly because of his patients, but partly from a lack of incentive in going away. He explained that lack of incentive to me during one of the spins in his runabout to which he treated me on three or four evenings a week. Now and then I worked Lovey off on him for an outing, but he, Cantyre, was generally a little peevish after such occasions. It was not that he objected to giving Lovey or any one else the air; it was that he suspected me of not

really caring to go out with him. There are always men—very good fellows, too—in whom there is this strain of the jealousy of school-girls.

On this particular evening I had been kidding him about his depression, doing my best to rouse him out of it.

"Oh, I'll pull round in time," he said, in his resigned, lifeless tone. "If you knew the reason—"

I did know the reason, of course. My conscience never ceased to plague me with the fact that, though I could return Regina Barry's trinkets, Cantyre's secret was a theft I couldn't get rid of. It was, indeed, partly to lead him on to confiding it to me of his own accord, so that I might know it legitimately, so to speak, that I brought the subject up.

"I suppose it's about a girl."

So long a time passed that I thought he was not going to respond to this challenge, when he said, "Yes."

"Wouldn't she have you?" I asked, bluntly.

"She said she would—and changed her mind."

"So that you were actually engaged?"

"For about a month."

"Did she— You don't mind my asking questions, do you?"

"Not if you won't mind if I don't answer."

"Then with that proviso I'll go on. Did she tell why she—why she broke it off?"

"Not—not exactly."

"And haven't you found out?"

"Elsie Coningsby, she's her great friend, told me something of it. She said there were two kinds of women. Some liked to be wooed, and others weren't satisfied unless they were conquered."

"And you took the wrong method?"

"So it seems."

"Well, why don't you turn round now and take the right one?"

His dreamy, melancholy eyes slid toward me.

"Do you see me doing that? I'm the kind of bloke that would like a woman to conquer him. If it comes to that, there are two kinds of men."

He had told me so much that I felt it right to give him a warning.

"Since you say she's a friend of Elsie Coningsby's, I mayn't be able to help finding out who she is."

"Oh, I shouldn't mind that—not with you. As a matter of fact, I should like to introduce you to her one of these days."

I broke in more hastily than I intended, "No, no; don't do that—for God's sake!"

He swung round in amazement. "Why—why, what's the matter?"

I tried to recover myself. "Oh, nothing! Only, you must see for yourself that—that after what I've been through I'm not—not a lady's man."

"Oh, get out!" was his only observation.

We lapsed into one of our long silences, which was broken when we turned back toward town.

"Look here, Frank," he said, suddenly, "you can't go on living down there in Vandiver Street. Besides, the club will be needing your bed for some one else."

"I know," I said. "I've been thinking about it. I simply don't want to move."

"You'll have to, though."

"Yes, I suppose so."

He went on to suggest a small apartment in the bachelor house he was living in himself. Now was the time to

rent, before men began coming back to town. He knew of a little suite of three rooms and a bath which ought to be within my means. As we passed the house we stopped and looked at it. I liked it and promised to turn the matter over in my mind.

Next day I broached it to Lovey. The effect was what I expected. He grasped me by the arm, looking up at me with eyes the more eloquent from the fact that they were dead.

"Y'ain't goin' to leave me, Slim?"

"It wouldn't be leaving you, Lovey."

"Y'ain't goin' to live in another 'ouse, where I sha'n't be seein' ye every day?"

"You could get a room near."

"'Twouldn't be the same thing—not noway, it wouldn't be. Oh, Slim!"

With a gesture really dramatic he smote his chest with his two clenched fists, and drew a long, grating sigh.

We were sitting on our beds, which were side by side in one of the dormitories. It was the nearest thing to privacy the club-house ever allowed us.

"This 'll be the hend of me; and it 'll be the hend of you, Slim, if I ain't there to watch over you. You'll never keep straight without me, sonny." He was struck with a new idea, and, indeed, I had thought of it myself. "Didn't ye say," he went on, as he leaned forward and tapped my knee, "that in them rooms there was one little dark room?"

"Very little and very dark."

"But it wouldn't be too little or too dark for me, Slim, not if I could be your valet, like. I could do everythink for you, just like a gentleman. My father was a valet, and he larned me before he couldn't larn me nothink

else. I could keep your clothes so as you'd never need new ones, and I could mend and darn and cook your breakfasts—I'm a swell cook—I can bile tea and coffee and heggs—many's the time I've done it—"

"All right, Lovey," I interrupted. "It's a bargain. We're buddies."

"No, Slim; we won't be buddies no more. We'll call that off. We'll just be master and man. I'll know my place and I'll keep it. I sha'n't call you Slim, nor sonny—"

"Oh yes, you must."

He shook his head.

"No; not after we've moved from the club. I'll call you Mr. Melbury and say sir to you; and you must call me Lovey, just as if it was my real name." He added, unexpectedly to me: "I suppose ye know it ain't my real name?"

"Oh, what does it matter?"

"It only matters like this: I ain't—I ain't—" He got up in some agitation and went to one of the windows. After looking out for a second or two he turned half round toward me. "Ye ain't thinking me any better than I am, Slim, are you?"

"I'm not thinking whether you're better or worse, Lovey. I just like you."

"And I've took an awful fancy to you, Slim. Seems as if you was my whole family. But—but you're not, sonny. I've—I've got a family. They're dead to me and I'm dead to them; but they're my family. Did ye know that, Slim?"

"I didn't know it, and you needn't tell me."

"But if I was awful bad, sonny? If I was wuss than anythink that 'd ever come into your 'ead?"

"We won't talk about that. Perhaps there are things

that I could tell you which would show that there's not much difference between us."

"I 'ope there is, Slim. And she was terr'ble aggravatin'; a drinkin' woman, besides. I didn't drink then —'ardly not at all. It was after I was acquitted I begun that. And my two gells—well, bein' acquitted didn't make no difference to them; they'd seen. Only, they didn't swear that way in their hevidence. They swore she fell down the stairs she was found at the bottom of, her neck broken; and, bein' a drinkin' woman, the jury thought— But the two gells knew. And when I was let off they didn't 'ave no more to do with me—so I come over 'ere—"

I rose and went to him, laying my hand on his shoulder.

"Don't, Lovey. That's enough. I don't care who you are or what you've done, we'll stick it out together. The only thing is that we'll have to give up the booze."

"For good and all, Slim?"

"Yes; for good and all."

"It 'll be awful 'ard."

"Yes, it will be; but the worst of that is over."

He seized one of my hands in both of his.

"Slim, if it's got to be a ch'ice between you and liquor —well, I'm danged if—if I won't"—he made a great resolution—"give up the liquor—and so 'elp me!"

So when I moved Lovey moved with me. Washing windows having become a lucrative profession, he insisted on taking no wages from me and on paying for his own food. In the matter of names we agreed on a compromise. "Before company," as he expressed it, I was Mr. Melbury and sir; when we were alone together we reverted to the habits of Greeley's Slip and the Down and Out, and I became Slim and sonny.

I was truly sorry to leave the club, for its simple, brotherly ways, wholesome and masculine, if never the most refined, had become curiously a part of me. I had liked the fellowship with rough men who were perhaps all the more human for being rough. For the first time in my life I had known something of genuine fraternity. I do not affirm that we lived together without disagreements or misunderstandings or that there were no minutes electric with the tension that makes for an all-round fight. But there was always some "wise guy," as we called him, to make peace among us; and on the whole we lived together with a mutual courtesy that proved to me once for all that it is nothing external which makes a gentleman. Finer gentlemen in the essentials of the word I never met than some of those who were just struggling up from the seemingly bottomless pit.

Thus the summer of 1913 became for me a very happy one. There were reserves to that happiness, and there were fears; but the optimism most of us bring to the day's work enabled me to face them. Of Regina Barry I heard much from my friend Cantyre, and I made what I heard suffice me. He was always willing to talk of this girl, whom he never named; and little by little I formed an image in my heart, which would never be anywhere but in my heart as long as I could help it. As long as I could help it I should not see her, nor should she see me. As to that I was now quite positive. Nothing could be gained by my seeing her, while by her seeing me everything might be lost.

If everything was lost in one way I was sure it would be lost in another. Because I have said little or nothing of the fight I was making you must not suppose that I was free from the necessity of making it. I was making

it every day and hour. There were times when, if I hadn't had Lovey to think of, I should have yielded to that suggestion which had come to me as neatly as it had come to him of having a little fall. Falls were far from unknown among us. They were accepted as an unhappy matter of course. Some of our steadiest members had made full use of the three times the law of the club allowed them before finally settling down. I believed that I could exercise this privilege—and come back. But not so with Lovey! Once he failed in this attempt, I knew he would be gone. As a matter of fact, he would have failed at any time after the first week if it hadn't been on my account; so I couldn't fail on his. When I would have done it eagerly, wildly, I was withheld by the old-fashioned motto of *noblesse oblige*.

And yet in proportion as I grew stronger I realized more clearly that my future was, as it were, balanced on the point of a pin. Once I had met Regina Barry, and her eyes had said, "You are the man who stole my gold-mesh purse," I knew it would be all up with me. She wouldn't have to say a word. Her look would bring the accusation. Then, if I was weak I should go off and get drunk; I should drink till I drank myself to death. If I was strong I should shoot myself. There was just one thing of which I was sure—I should never face that silent charge a second time.

But as the weeks went by and nothing happened I began to be confident that nothing would. We reached the end of September and I never heard Regina Barry's name. Even Cantyre hadn't told me that, and didn't suppose that I knew it. I calculated the chances against our ever meeting. I built something, too, on the possibility that were we to meet she wouldn't know me again.

In this I got encouragement from the fact that one day in Fifth Avenue I met my uncle Van Elstine. He didn't know me. He wouldn't have cut me for anything in the world; he was too good-natured and kind; but he let his wandering gaze rest on me as on any passing stranger, and went on his way. I argued then that time, vicissitude, a hard life, and a mustache had worked an effective disguise. If my own uncle, who had known me all my life, could go by like that, how much more one to whom I could be nothing but a sinister shadow seen for three or four minutes in a rose-colored gloom.

So I reasoned and became a little comforted. And then one day my arguments were put to the test.

It was quite at the end of September. The memorial was now so nearly completed that Coningsby, who had returned to town, left it almost entirely to my charge. A new bit of work at Atlantic City having come his way, he was closely absorbed in it. Mrs. Grace had motored up once or twice to consult me as to papers, rugs, and other details of interior decoration. I found her a grave, beautiful woman who gave the impression of nourishing something that lasts longer than grief—a deep regret. Our intercourse was friendly but impersonal.

Once she was accompanied by a young lady whose voice I recognized as they approached the room in which I was at work. It was a clear, bell-like, staccato voice, whose tones would have made my heart stop still had I heard it in heaven. Mrs. Grace entered the room, followed by a girl as Anglo-Saxon in type as her brother, only with a decision and precision in the manner which he had not.

In my confusion I was uncertain as to whether or not there was an introduction, but I remember her saying:

"Oh, Mr. Melbury, Ralph is so indebted to you for all the help you've given him. He says if it hadn't been for you he wouldn't have been able to get away from New York this summer."

She, too, regarded me impersonally, as her brother's assistant, and no more. I mean by that that she showed none of the interest good people generally display in a brand that has been plucked from the burning.

"Is it possible she doesn't know it?" I asked Cantyre the next time I saw him.

"Of course she doesn't. That would be the last thing Coningsby would tell her. We never speak of these things outside the club. If a fellow likes to do it himself—well, that's his own affair."

But early in October I came face to face with it all.

I was standing at one of the upper windows, looking down into Blankney Place, when I saw a motor drive up to the door. I knew it was Mrs. Grace's motor, having seen it a number of times already. When the footman held open the door Mrs. Grace herself stepped out, to be followed by Miss Coningsby, who in turn was followed by . . .

I strolled away from the window into the interior of the house. I was not so much calm as numb. There were details about which I had to speak to Mrs. Grace, but they all went out of my mind. They went out of my mind as matters with which I had no more concern. A dying man might feel that way about the earthly things he is leaving behind. I was, in fact, not so much like a dying man as like a man who in the full flush of vigor is told that he must in a few minutes face the firing-squad.

So I stood doing nothing, thinking nothing, while I listened to the three voices as they floated up, first from

the lower floor, then from the stairway, then from the floor on which I was waiting in this seeming nervelessness.

They drifted nearer—Mrs. Grace's gentle tones, Elsie Coningsby's silvery tinkle, and then the rich mezzo, which by association of ideas seemed to shed round me a rose-colored light.

Mrs. Grace and Miss Coningsby came in together, the one in black, the other in white. Both bade me a friendly, impersonal good morning, while Mrs. Grace proceeded at once to the question of rugs. Didn't I think that good serviceable American rugs, with some of those nice Oriental druggets people used in summer cottages, would be better than anything more fragile and expensive?

I made such answers as I could, keeping my eyes on the door. Presently she appeared on the threshold, looking about with interest and curiosity in her great, dark eyes. Of the minute I retain no more than a vision in rough green English tweed, with a goldish-greenish motoring-veil round the head like a nimbus. She impressed me as at once more delicate and more strong than I remembered her—eager, alert, independent.

"This is to be the men's smoking-room," Miss Coningsby explained.

"Wouldn't you know it?" Miss Barry said, lightly. "One of the nicest rooms in the house—I think the very nicest. It's wonderful how well men do themselves, isn't it?"

"Oh, but in this case it's Hilda."

"It's your brother first of all. You'll see. It will be the snuggest corner of the whole place, and they won't let a woman look into it."

She glanced at me—but casually. She glanced again—but casually again. As no one introduced me, a greet-

ing between us was not called for. But when Mrs. Grace finished her questions about the rugs and they were passing into the next room, Regina Barry turned and looked at me a third time. It was now an inquiring look, and significant.

"Elsie, who's that man?" I heard her say, after she had joined her companions.

The reply gave my name.

"Oh!"

"He's been helping Ralph all summer. That's how he and Esther were able to get away."

"Oh!"

"Now we're going on to the day nursery—"

But Regina Barry said: "Wait a minute! No; go on. I'll overtake you. I'm—I'm perfectly sure that that's the very man who—" She added, as if forcing herself to a determination: "I'm going back to speak to him. Tell Hilda I'll be with her in an instant."

So I waited, repeating to myself the formula agreed on two or three months before, that I would see her first—and shoot myself afterward.

CHAPTER IX

"HAVEN'T we met before?"

Regina Barry said this as she came into the room with her rapid, easy movement and took two or three paces toward me, stopping as abruptly as she entered.

I hung my head, crimsoning slowly.

"Yes."

"I thought so, though I didn't recognize you at first. I knew I had some association with you, but it was so vague—"

"Of course."

"Then I had no idea you were an architect."

"How could you?"

"You see, meeting you for so short a time—"

"And practically in the dark—"

"I don't remember that. But I had no chance to ask anything about you. I only hoped you'd come back."

"Oh, I couldn't have done that."

"Why not?"

"I should think you'd understand."

"I don't—considering that I asked you particularly."

"I know you asked me particularly, but anything in life—or death—would have been easier than to obey you."

"What did I do to frighten you so?"

"Nothing but show me too much mercy."

"Oh, I didn't think anything of that."

"Of what? Of the crime—or of the forgiveness?"

"Of the crime, of course."

I stepped back from her in amazement.

"You didn't think anything of—"

"Why, no! I've often done the same myself."

"You? You've often done—"

"Of course! Everybody has—at one time or another in their lives. Naturally it doesn't happen every day—and one wouldn't want it to. One wouldn't have anything left in the house if it did; but once in a way—it's nothing. What astonishes me is that you should have thought of it."

"But—but you've thought of it."

"Oh, well—that's different. But please don't suppose that I've thought of it seriously. It simply happened that that evening—" The only sign of embarrassment she gave was in grasping the greenish-goldish veil with her left hand and pulling it round over her bosom. The great eyes, of which the light made one doubtful as to the color, glowed feverishly, and the long scarlet lips threw at me one of their daring, challenging smiles. "Do you want me to be absolutely frank?"

"We began with frankness, didn't we? Why shouldn't we keep it up?"

"Well, it happened that that evening I'd broken off my engagement."

Not to betray all I had learned by my eavesdropping behind the rose-colored hangings, I merely said, "Indeed?"

"Yes; and so I was a little—well, perhaps a little excited. And anything that happened impressed me more than it would have done ordinarily. If I've thought of the way you appeared—and what happened when you

did—it's only been because it was part of the hours right after—" There was another of those smiles that were amusingly apologetic as well as amusingly provocative. "You're—you're not married, are you?"

"No."

"Nor engaged?"

"No."

"Ever been?"

"No."

"Then you can't imagine what it is to have been engaged and nearly married—and then to find yourself free again. Everything associated with the minute comes to be imprinted on your memory. That's why I've thought of it, though I didn't for the minute recognize you as the man."

"And now that you have recognized me—"

"I hope you'll do as I asked you before, and come and see us again." She added, as she was about to turn away, "How's Annette?"

I had been puzzled hitherto; I was now bewildered.

"You mean Annette Van Elstine? Did you know she was my cousin?"

"Of course! Didn't she bring you?"

"Bring me?" I stammered. "Bring me—where?"

"Why, to our house!"

"When?"

"The time we're talking about—when you upset Mrs. Sillinger's coffee and broke the cup."

It is difficult to say whether I was relieved or not. I could only falter, "I—I don't believe I'm the man."

She came back two or three steps toward me.

"Why, of course you're the man! Isn't your name Melbury?"

"Yes—but—but I'm not the only Melbury. Could it have been my—my brother, Jack?"

"What's your name?"

"Frank."

She gazed at me a minute before saying: "Then—then I think it must have been—your brother. I remember now that Annette did call him Jack." She continued, "But what did you mean when—when you said it was you?"

"Don't you know?"

"I haven't the remotest idea."

"Look at me again."

"I can't look at you again, because I'm looking at you all the time. You're most wonderfully like your brother."

"I don't think I am. I met my uncle Van Elstine in the street the other day and he didn't know me."

"Oh, well, strangers often see resemblances that escape members of a family. All I get by looking at you is that I see your brother. He was awfully nice. We so—we so wished he'd come back. He—he wasn't like everybody else."

"He's married now."

I wonder if I am right in thinking that a slight shadow crossed her face. There may have been, too, a forced jauntiness in her tone as she said, "Oh, is he?"

I nodded.

She turned away again, but again wheeled half round to face me.

"Well, now we know what I meant; but what on earth did you mean?"

I drew myself up for real inspection.

"Can't you think?"

She shook her head.

"I must say you seemed inordinately penitent over a broken cup, even if Mrs. Sillinger was so cross. She said you spilled the coffee all over her dress; but you didn't."

"You mean Jack."

"Oh yes! What a bother! I shall always get you mixed up in the future."

"I hope not—for his sake."

"Now don't tease me. Tell me where we met."

"If I do—"

She brightened, the smile of the scarlet lips growing vividly brilliant.

"I know. It was at the Millings', at Tarrytown."

"I'm afraid not."

"Then it was at the Wynfords', at Old Westbury? They always have so many people there—"

"Think again."

"What's the good of thinking when, if I could remember you, I should do it right away?"

"It seems extraordinary to me that you can have forgotten."

"You seem very sure of the impression you made on me."

"I am."

"And I've forgotten all about it!"

"You haven't forgotten the impression; you've only forgotten me."

"Oh, Mr. Melbury, tell me! Please! I've got to run off and overtake Mrs. Grace; and I can't do it unless I know."

You will admit that my duty at this juncture required some considering. In the end I said: "I sha'n't tell you to-day. I may do it later. In any case, I've given you

so many tips that you can't fail to see for yourself what they lead to. You'll probably have recalled by to-night."

"Then I shall ring you up to-morrow and tell you."

"No, please don't do that; and yet, on second thoughts, I know that when you've remembered you won't want to."

She said, while withdrawing again toward the adjoining room, "You certainly know how to make a thing mysterious."

"I'm not making anything mysterious. You'll see that, after it's all come back to you."

But, having passed into the next room, she returned to the threshold to say: "I know you're only making fun of me. I never met you, because I couldn't have forgotten you. And I couldn't have forgotten you, because you're so like your brother. But we'll talk about it all some other time."

The first thing I did was to go to a room where there was a full-length mirror fixed to the wall and examine myself in the glass. Was it possible that I had changed so much in the brief space of four months? The reflection told me nothing. In the tall, slim figure in the neat gray check I could still see the sinister fellow who had slept at Greeley's Slip and skulked about the Park and crept into a house at midnight. The transformation had come so imperceptibly that the one image was no more vital to me than the other. Inwardly, too, I felt no great assurance against a relapse. I was like an insect toiling up a slippery perpendicular. Not only was each step difficult, but it might in the end land me at the bottom where I began. In other words, I had still within me the potentialities of the drunkard; and to the drunkard all aberrations are possible.

That night I put the question up to Lovey.

"Lovey, do I look the same as I did four or five months ago?"

"You looks just as good to me, sonny."

"Yes, but suppose you hadn't seen me in the mean while, and had come on me all of a sudden, would you know right off that it was me?"

"Slim, if I was blind and deaf and dumb, and couldn't see nothink nor 'ear nothink nor feel nothink, I'd know it was you if you come 'arf a mile from where I was."

Since this intuitiveness was of no help to me, I worked round to the subject when, later in the evening, I had gone in to smoke a good-night pipe with Cantyre.

He had a neat little corner suite which gave one a cheery view of the traffic in Madison Avenue north and south by a mere shifting of the eyes. I sat in the projecting semicircle that commanded this because, after my own outlook into an airshaft, I enjoyed the twinkling of the lights. To me the real Ville Lumière is New York. It scatters lights with the prodigal richness with which the heaven scatters stars. It strings them in long lines; it banks them in towering façades; it flings them in handfuls up into the darkness; it writes them on the sky. Twilight offers you a special beauty because, wherever you are in the city, it brings out for you in one window or another that first wan, primrose-colored beacon—in some ways more beautiful than the evening star. Behind the star you don't know what there is, while behind the light there is a palpitating history. Then as you look down from some high perch other histories light their lamps, till within half an hour the whole town is ablaze with them—a light for every life-tale—as in pious places there is one for every shrine.

Those who were looking at ours saw nothing but a

green-shaded lamp, and yet it lit up such bits of drama as Cantyre's and mine. So behind every other shining star, in tower or tenement, dwelling-house or hotel, there was tragedy, comedy, adventure, farce, or romance, all in multifold complexity, while before each human story there glowed this tranquil fire.

If I had not been an architect, with a knowledge of interior decoration as part of my profession, I might not have been worried by the sybaritic note in Cantyre's rooms. Being fond of flowers, he had sheaves of gladioluses and chrysanthemums wherever he could stack them. Over the tables he threw bits of beautiful old brocades, ineffable in color. Framed and glazed, a seventeenth-century chasuble embroidered in carnations did duty as a fire-screen. Japanese pottery grotesques and Barye bronzes jostled one another on the mantelpiece and low bookcases, while the latter housed rows of handsome volumes bound to suit Cantyre's special taste and stamped with his initials. He himself, stretched in a long chair, wore a dressing-gown of an indescribable shade of plum faced with an equally indescribable shade of blue. The plum socks and blue leather slippers couldn't have been an accident; and as I had dropped in on him unexpectedly I knew that all this *recherche* was not to dazzle any one—I could have forgiven that—but for his own enjoyment.

No one could have been kinder to me than he was—and I liked him. I reminded myself that it was none of my business if his tastes were fastidious, and that to spend his money this way was better than in lounging about bar-rooms, as I had done; and yet I could understand that a girl like Regina Barry should be impatient of these traits in a husband.

I sat, however, with my back to it all, astride of a small chair, my pipe in my mouth, looking down on the lights and traffic.

Breaking a long silence, I said, as casually as I could do it: "I met Sterling Barry's daughter the other day—Miss Regina Barry, her name is, isn't it?"

Vague, restless movements preceded the laconic response, "Where?"

"She came to the memorial with Mrs. Grace."

Hearing him strike a match, I knew he was making an effort at sang-froid by lighting a cigarette.

"Did you—did you—think her—pretty?"

"Pretty wouldn't be the word."

"Beautiful?"

"Nor beautiful."

"What then?"

"No word that I know would be adequate. You might say fascinating if it hadn't been vulgarized; and chic would be worse."

"She's tremendously animated—and vivid."

"She has the most living eyes and mouth I've ever seen in a human being. I've never seen a face so aglow with mind, emotion, and color. She's all flame, but a flame like that of the burning bush, afire from a force within."

He spoke bitterly. "And people talk about that being conquered!"

To lead him further I said, "Has any one talked of it?"

"Didn't you know?"

"How should I know? You—you've never told me."

"Well, I'm—I'm telling you now."

My sympathy was quite genuine.

"Thanks, old boy. I can see—I can see how hard it must have gone with you."

"How hard it's going, Frank. There's a difference in tense. If you knew her better—"

"I'm not sure that I care to know her better; and that, old man, isn't said out of rudeness. I don't belong to her world any more; and I'd rather not try to get back into it."

"Oh, get out! As a matter of fact I'm going to take you to see her."

"You needn't do that, because she asked me to come."

"Right off the bat like that? The first time she'd ever seen you?"

"It wasn't exactly that. She knew my brother Jack; and my cousin, Annette van Elstine, is a friend of hers."

"Annette van Elstine is your cousin? Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"Oh, for reasons. I should think you'd see. Why should I claim Annette as a cousin? One of the smartest women in New York, I'm told she is."

"One of the very smartest. She could do anything for you."

"So there you are! When you think of what I was when you first met me—what I am still, really—" It seemed to me, however, that I had found my opening, so I went on in another vein. "I met Annette's father in the street one day, not long ago, and he went by without recognizing me. Have I changed very much—since the spring?"

"I should know you anywhere, Frank; but Coningsby and Christian were saying last week that they wouldn't take you to be the same man any more."

"Did they mean morally—or physically?"

"Oh, they meant in looks. They said they'd never seen any one in whom good clothes and a straight life had so thoroughly created a new man."

"So that you think my uncle might reasonably—"

"Pass you without recognition? Oh, Lord, yes! Besides, your mustache changes you a lot. I'd shave that off again if I were you; and you want to get back to your old self."

To end the subject I said merely: "I'm glad to hear that I don't look as I did; because—because I shouldn't like to think that the good old fellow had cut me."

CHAPTER X

MY problem was now as to how to tell Regina Barry who I was; and it would have been more urgent had I not felt sure that sooner or later she must guess. Indeed, she might have guessed already. I had no means of knowing. During the four or five days since her visit to the memorial no echo of our meeting had come back to me.

But I was not left long in doubt.

The William Grace Memorial was now practically ready for furnishing. Mrs. Grace was about to move back to town in order to undertake the task. Coningsby and I were going through the rooms one day with an eye to details that might have been overlooked when he said, "Well, there doesn't seem much more for you to do here, does there?"

I replied that as far as any further need of my services was concerned I might knock off work there and then—thanking him for all his help through the summer.

"And now," he went on, "I should like you to come in on this job at Atlantic City if you'd care to. You see, you and I understand each other; we speak the same language both professionally and socially; and it's not so easy as you might think to pick up a chap of whom you can say that. Why not come up to our little place—say to-morrow night—and dine with us, and we could talk it over? My wife told me to ask you."

Knowing that Coningsby had been aware of the state of my wardrobe a few months earlier, I blushed to the roots of my hair as I put the question: "What shall I wear? Tails—or a dinner jacket and black tie?"

"Oh, a dinner jacket. There'll be just ourselves."

But when I went I found not only my host and hostess, but Regina Barry to make the party square.

The Coningsbys lived on the top floor of an apartment-house on the summit of the ridge between the west side of the Park and the Hudson. Below them lay a picturesque tumble of roofs running down to the river, beyond which the abrupt New Jersey heights drew a long straight line against the horizon. Sunset and moonset were the special beauties of the site, with the swift and ceaseless current to add life and mystery to the outlook.

The apartment differed from Cantyre's in that its simplicity would have been bare had it not produced an impression of containing just enough. The walls of the drawing-room were of a pale-gold ocher against which every spot of color told for its full value. On this background the green of chairs, the rose of lamp-shades, the mahogany of tables, and the satinwood of cabinets pleased and rested the eye. There were no pictures in the room but a portrait of Mrs. Coningsby, which one of the great artists of the day had painted for her as a gift. In its richness of copper-colored hair and diaphanous jade-green draperies the room got all the decoration it required.

I had heard Regina Barry's voice on entering, and knew that I was up against my fate. That is to say, the revolver lay ready in my desk. Knowing that such a meeting as this must occur some time, I was in earnest as to using the weapon on the day when her eyes accused me. As I took off my overcoat and hat and laid them on a

settle in the hall, I said I should probably do it when I went home that night. It would depend on how she looked at me.

Meeting me at the door of the drawing-room, Mrs. Coningsby was sweet and kindly in her welcome without being over-demonstrative. I had heard of her beauty, but was not prepared for anything so magnificent. Her height, her complexion, her hair, her free movements—were those of a goddess. I liked and admired Coningsby; but I wondered how even he had caught this Atalanta and imprisoned her in a flat on the west side of New York.

"You know Miss Barry, don't you?" were the words with which she directed me toward the end of the room, where the other guest was seated in a low armchair by a corner of the fireplace.

So the supreme moment came. I went the length of the room knowing that I was facing it.

I suppose it is instinct that tells women how to avoid comparisons with each other by creating contrasts. Knowing that in competition with her hostess she would have everything to lose, Miss Barry used Mrs. Coningsby as a foil. In other words, she had divined the fact that her friend would be in black with a spangling of blue-green sequins, and so had enhanced her own vividness by dressing in a bright rose-red. What she lacked in beauty, therefore, she made up in a brilliancy that stood out against the pale-gold ocher background with the force of a flaming flower.

As I stooped to take the hand she held up languidly I tried to search her eyes. They told me nothing. The fire in them seemed not exactly to have gone out, but to have been hidden behind some veil of film through which one could get nothing but a glow. Had she meant to

baffle me she couldn't have done it more effectively; but, as I learned later, she meant nothing of the kind. Her greeting, as far as I could judge of it, was precisely that which she would have accorded to any other diner-out.

During the exchange of commonplaces that ensued there were two things I noticed with curiosity and uneasiness. She wore the string of pearls I had seen once before—had had in my pocket, as a matter of fact—and the long diamond bar-pin. As to her rings I could not be sure, having on the night when I meant to steal them noticed nothing but their number. But the pearls and the diamonds arrested my attention—and my questionings. Was she wearing them on purpose? Was she holding them up as silent reminders between her and me? Was I to understand from merely looking at them the charge her eyes refused to convey?

I had no means of seeking an answer to these questions, because Coningsby came in and the process of being welcomed had to be gone through again. Moreover, the commonplaces which, when carried on *à deux*, might have led to something more personal remained as commonplaces and no more when tossed about *à quatre*.

On our going in to dinner the same tone was maintained, and I learned nothing from any interchange of looks. There was, in fact, no interchange of looks. Miss Barry talked to her right and to her left, but rarely across the table. When it became necessary to speak a word directly to me she did it with so hasty a glance that it might easily not have been a glance at all. The burning eyes that had watched me so intently on our first meeting, and studied me with so much laughing curiosity on our second, kept themselves hidden. Since it was on them that I had reckoned to tell me what I was so eager to

be sure of, I was like a man who hopes to look through a window and finds it darkened by curtains.

After dinner, however, I got an opportunity. Conings-by and his wife were summoned to the nursery to discuss the manifestations of some childish ailment. Miss Barry and I being left alone before the fire, I was able to say, "Well, have you thought of it?"

Some of the customary vivacity returned to her lips and eyes. She had at no time seemed unkindly—only absent and rather dreamy. She was rather dreamy still, but more on the spot mentally.

"Thought of what?"

"Of—of where we first met."

"Oh, that! I'm sorry to say I've been too busy to do any searching in my memory. But one of these days I must."

There was no mistaking the sincerity of her tone. She had not searched in her memory; she had not considered it worth while. Her interest in our meeting at the memorial had probably passed before she had driven away.

I must plead guilty to feeling piqued. That she should be so much in my mind and that I should occupy so small a place in hers not only disappointed but annoyed me. I said to myself, "Oh, well, if she cares so little there is no reason why I should care more." Aloud I made it: "Please don't bother about it. One of these days the recollection will come back to you of its own accord."

"Yes; I dare say." She went on without transition, "Whom did your brother marry?"

I told her.

"He wasn't like everybody else," she pursued. "I wonder—I wonder if you are?"

"Wouldn't that depend on what you mean by being like everybody else? I don't know that I get your standard."

"Oh, men are so much alike. There's no more difference between them than between so many beans in a bottle."

"I don't see that. To my mind they're all distinct from one another."

"In little ways, yes. But when it comes to the big ways—"

"What are the big ways?"

She weighed this, a forefinger against a cheek.

"The big ways are those which indicate character, aren't they? While the little ones only make for habits. Men differ as to their habits, but in character they're all cut on the same pattern—two or three patterns at most."

"But can't you say the same of women?"

"Very likely; only I don't have to marry a woman."

Since she had become personal, I ventured to do the same.

"Oh, so it's a question of marriage!"

"What other question is there when a girl like me is twenty-three? One has to decide that tiresome bit of business before one can tackle anything else."

I grew bolder.

"Decide as to whom to marry—or whether or not to marry at all?"

"Suppose I said as to whether or not to marry at all?"

"You mean that you'd like advice?"

"I'd listen to advice—if you've any to give."

I gathered all my strength together for the most tremendous effort of my life.

"Then, I should say this: That there are men in the world different from any you've ever seen yet. Wait!"

She laughed—an intelligent laugh, full of music, mirth, and comprehension.

"Do you know, that reminds me of something awfully strange that happened to me a few months ago? Some one else said just those words to me—or, rather, wrote them down."

I pulled my chair so that her eyes rested on me more directly.

"How?"

"Oh, I can't tell you. I said I never would—so I mustn't. I should love to—though I never shall."

"Was it—interesting?"

"Thrilling! But there! I'm not going to tell you. I shouldn't have mentioned it if what you say hadn't been so oddly like—"

But Coningsby came back into the room to ask if Miss Barry wouldn't join his wife in the nursery to see little Rufus while he was awake. In the mean time he and I would retire to his own snuggery and talk business.

While I followed his account of the hotel he was building sufficiently to get his ideas and to know what he expected of me, I was saying to myself: "She doesn't know me. She doesn't know me at all. It never occurs to her as a possibility that the man who wrote those words is the one she is now asked to meet at dinner. How am I ever to get the nerve to let her know?"

When I found the opportunity I put the question, "Have your wife and Miss Barry any idea about me?"

"About you? You mean about—"

"The Down and Out."

"Lord, no! What would be the good of that?"

"The only good would be that—that I shouldn't be sailing under false colors."

"False colors be hanged! We've all got a right to the privacy of our private lives. You don't go nosing into any one else's soul; why should any one else go nosing into yours? Why, if I were to tell my wife all I could tell her about myself I should be ashamed to come home."

I knew this argument, and yet when I came to apply it to my attitude toward Regina Barry I was not satisfied.

CHAPTER XI

A FEW days later I was surprised to receive a note from Annette van Elstine. It ran:

DEAR FRANK,—I have just heard that you are in New York —that you have been here some time. Why did you never come to see me? It was not kind. And didn't you know that your mother has been heartbroken over your disappearance? Jerry and Jack knew you were somewhere in this country, but they've kept your mother in the dark. What does it all mean? Come to tea with me—just me—on Friday afternoon at five, and tell me all about it.

Your affectionate
ANNETTE.

As this was the first bit of connection with my own family since Jerry had practically kicked me down his steps, I was deeply perturbed by it. I am not without natural affection, and yet I seemed to have died to the old life as completely as Lovey to that with his daughters. I had never forgotten Jerry's words: "And now get out. Don't let any of us ever see your face or hear your name again."

The very fact that he was justified had roused the foolish remnant of my pride.

I had loved my mother; I had reverenced my father; though my brothers were indifferent to me, I had felt a genuine tenderness for my sisters. But since that night on Jerry's steps it had been to me as if I had put myself

on one side of a flood and left them on the other, and that there was no magic skiff that would carry me back whence I came. I cannot say that I grieved for them; and it was the last of my thoughts that they would grieve for me. I accepted the condition that we were dead to each other, and tried to bury memory.

And now came this first stirring of resurrection. It hurt me. I didn't want it. It was like the return of life to a frozen limb. Numbness was preferable to anguish.

"Lovey," I said, as the old man hung about me when I was undressing that night, "how would you feel if one of your daughters—"

He raised himself from the task of pulling off my boots, which to humor him I allowed him to perform, and looked at me in terror.

"They ain't—they ain't after me?"

"No, no! But suppose they were—wouldn't you like to see them?"

He dropped the boot he held in his hand.

"Y'ain't goin' to 'ave them 'unted up for me, Slim?"

"I don't know anything about them, Lovey. That isn't my point at all. But suppose—just suppose—you could see them again; would you do it?"

He shook his bald head.

"They're dead to me. I'm dead to them. If we was to see each other now 'twouldn't be nothink but diggin' up a corpse."

"Nothink but diggin' up a corpse," I repeated to myself as I turned east from Fifth Avenue, leaving the brown trees of the Park behind me, and took the few steps necessary to reach my uncle Van Elstine's door. He had married my mother's sister, and during the lifetime of my aunt the families had been fairly intimate. Of late

years they had drifted apart, as families will, though touch-and-go relations were still maintained.

I have to admit that while waiting for Annette in the library up-stairs I was nervous. I was coming back to that family life in which I should have interests, affections, cares, responsibilities. For the past three years I had had no one to think of but myself; and if in that freedom there were heartaches, there were no complexities.

Though it was not yet dark, the curtains were drawn and the room was lighted not only by a shaded lamp, but by the flicker of a fire. When Annette, wearing a tea-gown, appeared at last in the doorway she stood for a second to examine me.

"Why, Jack!" she exclaimed, then. "I didn't know you were in New York. Have you brought Frank with you?"

"I am Frank," I laughed, going forward to offer my hand. "I didn't know Jack and I were so much alike. But you're the second person who has said it within a few days."

"It's your mustache, I think," she explained as we shook hands. "I never saw you wear one before."

"I never did."

"Do sit down. They'll bring tea in a minute. I'm so glad to see you. But if it's not a rude question, tell me why you've been here all this time and never let me know."

It would be difficult to define the conditions which made Annette at the age of thirty-three what Cantyre styled one of the smartest women in New York, but the minute you saw her you felt that it was so. My uncle Van Elstine was only comfortably off; their house was not large; though they entertained a good deal, their

manner of living was not showy. But my aunt Van Elstine had established the tradition—some women have the art of doing it—that whatever she had and did and said was "the thing," and Annette, as her only child and heiress, had kept it up.

As far as I could understand the matter, which had been explained to me once or twice, my aunt was exclusive. In the rush of the newly come and the rise of the newly rich, which marked the last quarter of the nineteenth century in New York, she and a few like-minded friends had made it their business to pick and choose and form what might literally be called an *élite*. By 1913, however, the *élite* was not only formed but founded on a rock as firm as the granite of Manhattan, and Annette's picking and choosing could be on another principle. Hers was that more civilized American tendency to know every one worth knowing, which is still largely confined, so they tell me, to Washington and New York. Where her mother had withdrawn Annette went forward. Her *flair* for the important or the soon to be important was unerring. Hers was one of the few drawing-rooms through which every one interesting, both domestic and foreign, was bound at some time to pass. Being frankly and unrestrainedly curious, she kept in touch with the small as well as with the great, with the young as well as with the old, maintaining an enormous correspondence, and getting out of her correspondents every ounce of entertainment they could yield her. On her side she repaid them by often lending them a helping hand.

The warmth of her greeting now was due not to the fact that I was her cousin, but to her belief that I had been up to something. It was always those who had

been up to something with whom she was most eager to come heart to heart. Without temptations of her own, as far as I could ever see, she got from the indiscretions of others the same sort of pleasure that a scientist finds in studying the wrigglings of microbes under a microscope.

Having some inkling of this, I answered her questions not untruthfully, but with reservations, saying that I had not come to see her because I had been down on my luck.

"And how did you come to be down on your luck?"

"Can't you guess?"

"You don't look it now."

"I've been doing better lately. I've made two or three friends who've given me a hand." Carrying the attack in her direction, I asked, "How did you hear that I was in New York?"

"Hilda Grace told me. She said you'd been working on that memorial of hers. She thought it awfully strange —you won't think me rude in repeating it?—that a man like you should be only in a secondary position."

"If she knew how glad I was to get that—"

She changed the subject abruptly.

"When did you last hear from home?"

I thought it sufficient to say: "Not for a long time. I may as well admit that nowadays I never hear from home at all."

"And, if it's not a rude question, why don't you?"

"Partly, I suppose, because I don't write."

"So I understood from Jack. But, Frank dear, do you think it kind?"

I broke in with the question, the answer to which I had really come to get, "When did you last see Jack?"

"About eighteen months ago; just before he was

married. He knew you were somewhere about, but he wasn't confidential on the subject."

"No; he wouldn't be. Did he seem all right?"

"Quite; and awfully in love with Mary Sweet. What's she like, really?"

I described my new sister-in-law as I remembered her, going on to say: "I suppose you gave Jack a good time. Did you—did you take him about anywhere?"

"Let me see. I took him to—where was it? I took him to the Wynfords'—and—and—oh, yes!—to the Barrys'. And it's too funny! I really think Regina fell in love with him at first sight. For a month or two she questioned me about him every time we met. Then all of a sudden she stopped. If she was struck by the thunderbolt, as the French put it—well, all I can say is that it serves her right."

"Serves her right—what for?"

"Oh, the way she's carried on. It's disgraceful. Do you know her? Her father is an architect, like you."

Annette's round, dusky face, which had no beauty but a quick, dimpling play of expression, was one that easily betrayed her ruling passion of curiosity. It was now so alight with anticipation that I tried to be more than ever casual.

"I've—I've just met her."

"Where?"

"Once at the memorial, when she came with Mrs. Grace; and a few nights ago I dined with her at the Coningsbys'."

"I wonder she didn't take you for Jack."

To this I was not obliged to make a response for the reason that, the man having arrived with the tea, Annette had to give her attention to the placing of the tray.

When I had taken a cup of tea from her hand I created a diversion with the question, "What did you mean by saying the way she carried on was disgraceful?"

"Why, the way she gets engaged and disengaged. It's been three times in as many years, and goodness knows how many more experiments—"

"I suppose she's trying to find the right man."

"It's pretty hard on those she takes up and puts down in the process. She'll get left in the end, you'll see if she doesn't."

"Isn't it better to get left than to marry the wrong man?"

"The very day I took Jack to see her she'd broken off her engagement to Jim Hunter. I didn't know it at the time. It was two or three days later before it came out. If I had known it and told Jack—"

"Well, what then?"

"Oh, I don't say anything. They were awfully taken with each other. But I'm glad he was saved. If he hadn't gone straight back to Montreal he might now be in the place of poor Stephen Cantyre."

"I see a good deal of Cantyre."

"So I understand."

"Who told you?"

"Elsie Coningsby."

"You seem to have got a good deal of information about me all of a sudden."

"Because you've dropped right into the little circle in which we all know one another with a kind of village-like intimacy. New York is really a congeries of villages."

"But any one could see that Cantyre would never make a husband for a high-spirited girl like Miss Barry."

"How do you know she's high-spirited, if it's not a rude question?"

"Oh, one can tell."

"You've seen her only twice. You must have noticed her very particularly."

"I've noticed Cantyre very particularly; and just as he wouldn't make her the right kind of husband she wouldn't make him the right kind of wife."

When Annette said anything in which there was a special motive a series of concentric shadows fled over her face like ripples from the spot where a stone is thrown into a pool.

"Well, I'm glad you don't like her, if it isn't a rude thing to say."

"What has my liking her or not liking her got to do with it?"

"Nothing but the question of your own safety. If she notices how much you're like Jack—"

"If she was going to notice that," I said, boldly, "she would have done it already."

"And so much the worse for you if she has—unless you're put on your guard."

"If you mean put on my guard against the danger of being Cantyre's successor in a similar experience—"

"That was my idea."

"Well, I can give you all the reassurance you need, Annette. In the first place, I've got no money—"

The relevance of her interruption did not come to me till nearly a year later.

"Frank dear, I must ask you, while I think of it, didn't you know that your mother was very, very ill?"

All the blood in my body seemed to rush back to my heart and to stay there. We talked no more of Regina

Barry, nor of anything but stark fundamental realities. In an instant they became as much the essentials of my life as if Regina Barry had never existed. Annette showed herself much better informed as to my career than she pretended to be, giving me to understand that the day on which I disappeared my mother had received a kind of death-blow. She was of the type to leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness to go after that which was lost; and in her inability to do so she had been seized, so Annette told me, with a mortal pining away. With her decline my father was declining also, and all because of me.

"I've been the most awful rotter, Annette," I groaned, as I staggered to my feet. "You know that, don't you?"

"Yes, Frank, I do know it. That's why I've been so glad to get hold of you at last, and ask you to—to redeem yourself."

"Redeem myself by going back?"

She looked up at me and nodded.

"Oh, but how can I?"

CHAPTER XII

MY question was answered next evening by Beady Lamont.

Greatly to Lovey's disgust, I made it a point to attend every Saturday meeting at the club.

"Them low fellas ain't fit company for you, Slim," he would protest. "What's the use of cuttin' out the booze and bein' rich if you don't 'old yer 'ead above the likes o' that?"

"They've been awfully white with us, Lovey."

"They wasn't no whiter with us than they'd be with anybody else; and don't three out o' every five give 'em the blue Peter?"

But though we had this discussion once a week, he always accompanied me to Vandiver Street, showing his disapproval when he got there in sitting by himself and refusing to respond to advances.

I have to confess that I needed the fellowship of men who had been through the same mill as myself, in order to keep up the fight. Again let me repeat it, I am giving you but a faint idea of the struggle I had to make. No evil habit relinquishes its hold easily, and the one to which I had given myself over is perhaps the most tenacious of all. It would be wearisome if I were to keep telling you how near I came at times to courting the old disaster, and how close the shave by which I sheered away; but I never felt safer than a blind man walking

along the edge of a cliff. More than once I tore the blue star from my buttonhole, though on each occasion I juggled myself into putting it back again. I juggled myself as I did on the morning when I gazed at the brown-green water flowing beneath Greeley's Slip. I said that what I didn't do to-day I would still be free to do to-morrow, thus tiding myself over the worst minutes, if only by a process of postponement.

But among my brothers at the club I heard so many tales of heroic resistance that I grew ashamed of my periods of weakness. What Pyn and Mouse and the Scotchman and the piano-mover and Beady Lamont could do, I told myself, I also could do. Moreover, new men came in, and more than one of the educated type turned to me for help. To a journalist named Edmonds, and to an actor named Prince, I stood as next friend, and only declined to officiate in the same capacity for Headlights, the big-eyed tailor, and the wee bye Daisy, when they returned, penitent, on the ground that I couldn't watch over more than two men efficiently. With the actor I had no trouble, but twice I had to go down to Stinson's and pull Edmonds out of a drunken spell. To keep him out was putting me on all my mettle; and in order to maintain my mettle I had to stay out myself. My courage was no whit nobler than that of the man who would turn tail in the battle if it weren't for shame before his comrades; but there is something to be got out of even such valor as that.

And in the club I got it. Perhaps we were all putting up a bluff. Perhaps those whom I looked upon as heroes were inwardly no more glorious than I. But when the fellows whom I patted on the back patted me in their turn, I was obliged to live up to their commendation.

There came, indeed, a time when I couldn't help seeing that in the eyes of new-comers especially I was taken as a pillar of the club, and knew that I couldn't fall without bringing down some of the living walls along with me. To be strong enough to hold up my portion of the weight became once more with me then a question of *noblesse oblige*.

The Saturday evening after my talk with Annette was a special one. After the actor, the journalist, Headlights, and Daisy had renewed their pledge for a week, Lovey and I stood up with the Scotchman, the piano-mover, and three or four others, and repeated ours for a month. It probably seems a simple thing to you; but for us who knew what had been our perils during the preceding month and the months preceding that, it was a solemn undertaking. The first vow of all had been relatively easy, since new resolutions have an attraction in themselves. The weekly vows that came afterward were not so fiercely hard, because they were but weekly. When it came to promising for a month—well, I can only say that to us a month had the length which it has to a child. It seemed to stretch on indefinitely ahead of one. The foe, retreating as we pressed forward, was always keeping up a rear-guard fight, and we never woke in the morning without being aware that we might strike an ambush before nightfall. We got so tired of the struggle that we often thought of the relief it would be to be captured; and many a time the resolution was made that when this month was up . . .

And just at these minutes the chaps who seemed stronger would close in about us, or those who seemed weaker would make some appeal, and when the critical Saturday evening came round we would walk up again,

impelled by forces beyond our control, and repledge ourselves.

On such occasions there was always some word spoken to us by men who had fought longer than we had and seen the enemy routed more effectively. That night the speaker to the blue-star men was that club benefactor and favorite, Beady Lamont. He was a huge mass of muscle, turning the scale at three hundred and more. Strength was in every movement when he walked and every pose when he stood still. To my architect's eye he planted his legs as though they were ancient Egyptian monoliths. Comparatively small round the abdomen, his chest was like a great drum. His arms—but why give a description? Hercules must have been like him, and Goliath of Gath, and Charlemagnè, and the Giants that were in Those Days. They said that in drink he used to be terrible; but now his big, jolly face was all a quiver of goodwill.

His voice was one of those husky chuckles of which the very gurgles make you laugh. To make you laugh was his principle function in the club. On this evening he began his talk with a string of those amusing, disconnected anecdotes which used to be a feature of after-dinner speeches, somewhat as a boy will splash about in the water before he begins to swim. But when he swam it was with vigor.

"And now some of you blue-star guys is probably hittin' a question that sooner or later knocks at the nuts of most of us chaps that's trying to make good all over again. That's families. Say, ain't families the deuce? You may run like a hare, or climb like a squirrel, or light away like a skeeter—and your family 'll be at your heels. It's somethin' fierce. You can never get away from

them; they'll never let you get away from them. Because"—his voice fell to a tone of solemnity—"because no matter how fast you sprint, or how high you climb, or how graceful you can dodge—you carries your family with you. You can no more turn your back on it than you can on your own stummick. You may refuse to pervide for it, you may treat it cruel, you may leave it to look out for itself; but you can never git away from knowin' in your heart that if you're a bum husband or father or son you're considerable more bum as a man. That's why the family is after us. Can't shake 'em off! Got 'em where they won't be shook off. God A'mighty Hisself put 'em there, and, oh, boys, listen to me and I'll tell you why."

He made dabs at his wrists as though to turn up his sleeves, like a man warming to his work. Taking a step or two forward he braced his left hand on his barrel-shaped hip, while his gigantic forefinger was pointed dramatically toward his audience.

"Say, did any of you married guys ever wish to God you was single again? Sure you did! Was any of you chaps with two or three little kids to feed ever sorry for the day when he heard the first of his young ones cry? Surest thing you know! Did any of us with a father and a mother, with brothers and sisters, too, very likely, ever kick because we hadn't been born an orphan and an only child? You bet your sweet life we did! The drinkin' man don't want no hangers-on. He wants to be free. Life ain't worth a burnt match to him when he's got other people to think of, and a home to keep up, and can't spend every penny on hisself. Some of us here to-night has cursed our wives; some of us has beat our children; some of us has cut out father and mother as if they'd

never done nothin' for us, and we could cast off from 'em with no more conscience than a tug 'll cast off from a liner.

"But, boys, when God A'mighty put us into this world He put us into a family first of all. He gives us kindness there, and care, and eddication, and the great big thing that fills the whole universe and that we ain't got no other name for only love. As soon as we'd got pretty well grown He give us another feeling—one that druv us by and by to go and start a family for ourselves. Most of us went and started one, and them that haven't done it yet 'll do it before the next few years is out. But, boys, what's it all for? Everything's got to be for somethin' or else it's just lumberin' up the ground; and this here matter of families is either the worst or the best thing you'll find anywhere on earth. If it's not the best it's the worst, and it has to be one or t'other.

"Now I stand before you as one who used to think it was the worst. I won't say nothin' of my father and mother. Them things is too sacred to be trotted out. But I'll speak of my wife, because she's that grateful for what's been done for me—and everything done for me has been done twice as much, ten times as much, for her —that she'd like me to bring her into whatever I've got to say. I've known the time when I was as crazy to be quit of my family as a dog to be rid of the tin can tied to his tail. I had a wife, then, and three children; and, O my God! but I thought they was a drag! I couldn't go nowhere without thinkin' I ought to be with 'em, and I couldn't take a drink without knowin' I had to steal it from my little boy and my two little girls. They was the p'ison of my life. There was nights when I was reelin' home and I used to hope that the house had been burnt

down durin' the day and they buried in the ashes. That'd leave me free again. Not to have no home—not to have to ante up for no one but myself—was the only thing I ever prayed for. And by gum, but my prayer was answered! One night I come home and found the house empty. My wife had decamped, and left a note that run somethin' like this: 'Dear Beady,' says she, 'I can't stand this life no more,' says she. 'If it was only me I wouldn't mind; but I can't see my children kicked and beat and starved and hated, not by no one.' And then she signed her name.

"Well, say, boys, most of you has heard what happened to me after that. I sure had one grand time while it lasted—and it lasted just about six months. I saw a man oncet—we was movin' a party from Harlem to the Bronx—fall down a flight of stairs with a sofa on his back, and he sure did get some pace on. Well, my pace was just about as quick—and as dead easy as he struck the landin' at the bottom I struck the gutter. Now you know the rest of my story, because some of you guys has had a hand in it.

"But what I want to tell you is this: That when I begun to come to again, as you might say, the first thing I wondered about was the wife and the kids. I couldn't get 'em out of my mind, nohow. What did I ever have 'em for? I asked myself. Why in hell did I ever get married? Nobody never druv me into it. I did it of my own accord. I went hangin' after the girl, who had a good place in the kitchen department of a big store, and I never let her have no peace till she said she'd marry me, and did it. Why had I been such a crazy fool? There was days and days, sittin' right in there in that back room, when I asked myself that; and at last I got

the answer. I'm goin' to tell it to you now, because there's a lot of you shysters that's only been a few weeks in the club that's askin' yourselves that very same thing. You've got wives and kids, the Lord knows where—scattered to the four winds of heaven, for anything you know—and you wish you hadn't. But, say, don't you go on wishin' no such thing; for I'm goin' to tell you what God A'mighty said to me right there in that back settin'-room."

He squared himself now, planting his Egyptian monoliths with a force which in itself was a kind of eloquence. His hands were thrust deep into his trousers pockets and his big chest expanded.

"'Beady,' God A'mighty says to me, and it was just as if I'd heard His voice, 'if a man don't have no one to think about but hisself he becomes the selfishest of all things under the sun. I'm God,' says He, 'with nothin' to do but enj'y myself; and yet if I didn't have you and the other things I make to care for and think about I wouldn't have nothin'. I've just got to have 'em, for if I didn't I'd go crazy. So I make beautiful worlds, and grand men, and noble women, and pretty kids, and strong animals, and sweet birds to sing, and nice flowers to bloom, and everything like that. I don't make nothin' ugly nor nothin' bad, nor no sickness nor sufferin' nor poverty. You guys does all that for yourselves, and I don't take no rest day nor night tryin' to show you how not to. Listen to me, Beady,' says He. 'Stop thinkin' about yourself and that awful hulk of a body, and what it wants to eat and especially to drink. Don't pay no more attention to it than you can help. Say, you're my son, and you're just like me. What you want is not the booze; it's somethin' outside yourself to think about. I've given

you a wife and three fine youngsters. Now get out and get after them. Cut out livin' for yourself and live for them. You must lose your life to find it; and the quickest way to lose your life is not to think about your beastly cravings at all.'

"Well, by gum! boys, if I didn't take God A'mighty at His word. I says to myself, I'll prove this thing or bust—and if I was to bust there'd be some explosion. When you fellows had kept me here long enough to let me be pretty nigh sure of myself I went and looked up the wife, and—well, there! I needn't say no more. Some of you dubs has been up to my little place and you know that Whatever spoke to me that day in that back room is in my little tenement in the Bronx if He ever was anywhere—and that brings me at last to my p'int.

"I'm speakin' to you blue-star men because you've showed pretty well by this time the stuff you're made of. As long as you was in danger of slippin' back I wouldn't say this to you at all. But, say, you've weathered the worst of it, so it's time for me to speak.

"Has any of you a wife? Then go back to her. Have you kids? Then go back to 'em. Have you a father or a mother? Then for God's sake let them know that you're doin' well. Go to 'em—write to 'em—call 'em up on the 'phone—send 'em a telegraph—but don't let 'em be without the peace o' mind that 'll come from knowin' that you're on your two feet. One of the most mysterious things in this awful mysterious life is the way somebody is always lovin' somebody. Here in these two rooms is a hundred and sixty-three by actual count of the seediest and most gol-darned boobs that the country can turn out. As we look at each other we can't help askin' if any one in their tarnation senses could care for the

likes of us. And yet for every bloomin' one of us you can foot up to eight or ten that 'll have us in their hearts as as if we was gold-headed cherubs.

"Say, boys, I'll tell you somethin' confidential like, and don't think I'm braggin'. The furniture-movin' business is the grandest one there is. For a man that's mastered it there don't seem anything in the world left for him to learn. He's ready to command a army or to run a ocean liner. But there's one thing I'll be hanged if even a furniture-mover knows anything about—and that's love. I've thought about it and thought about it—and it gets me every time. I don't know what it is, or where it comes from, or how they brew the durned thing in hearts like yours and mine. All I know is that it's there—and that this old world goes round in it. I'm buttin' into it all the time, and it kind o' turns me shy like. My own little home is so full of it that sometimes it makes me choke. If I try to get away from it and come down here—well, I'm blest if some bloke don't begin ladlin' it out to me when he don't hardly know what he's doin'. The furniture-movin' business is that shiny with it when you know how to see it— But I'll not say no more. You'd laff. You're laffin' at me now, and I don't blame you. All I've wanted to do is to put some of you boys wise. If there's a blue-star man who knows any one in the world that's fond of him—then for Christ's sake get after 'em! And do it not later than to-night."

And so I did it. Before going to bed I wrote a long letter to my father, giving him such details of my history during the past three years as I thought he would like to know. I hinted that if he or my mother would care for a visit from me I could go home for a few days.

Then I waited.

In a week I got my reply. It read:

My dear Frank,—I am glad to receive your letter, but sorry that it should ever have been necessary for you to write it. That you should be doing well no one could be more thankful for than I. I have given your messages to your mother, and she wishes me to send you her love. I consider it my duty to add, however, that no messages can withdraw the sword you have thrust into her heart—and mine.

Your affectionate father,

Edward Melbury.

CHAPTER XIII

AFTER that my work took me to Atlantic City, though not before I had had a number of meetings with Regina Barry, each of which, with one exception, took me by surprise.

The exception was the first. Cantyre urged me so strongly to come with him to call on Mrs. Barry and her daughter that in the end I yielded.

I found Mrs. Barry a charming invalid lady, keeping to the background and allowing her daughter to take all the initiative. From her as well as from Regina I got the reflex action of their liking for Jack. Mrs. Barry had seen him only once, but had preserved the memory of the pleasure which the meeting had given her. She repeated the statement, which had already grown familiar, that she thought Jack different from other men. Perhaps he was, though I could never see it. Perhaps she thought I was, myself, though she didn't say so in words.

In any case, the call was followed by an invitation to dinner, and not long after that Annette placed me next to Miss Barry at lunch. Mrs. Grace did the same, and so did Cantyre when he insisted on my joining a party he gave at a theater. Two or three other meetings were accidental, and if I say that in all of them Miss Barry herself made the advances it is only to emphasize my nervousness. I had no right to be meeting her; I had no business to be allowing her to talk to me and show that—well, that she didn't dislike me. The revolver

was still in my desk and I began to ask myself if it wasn't my duty to make use of it. True, she had not accused me with her eyes, but she was in some ways doing worse. What was to be the end of it?

I welcomed the work at Atlantic City, then, for more reasons than one. It took me away from New York; it kept me out of danger. Cantyre having confided to me the fact that his hopes were not dead, it left the field free to him. Never for a moment did he suspect that in my heart there was anything that could interfere with him; nor did he so much as dream that in hers . . .

It is curious that in proportion as the craving for drink diminished its place was taken by another craving for what I knew I couldn't have. There was every reason why I couldn't have it, why I could never have it. Atlantic City offered me, therefore, the readiest means of flight.

When that should be over I was planning a still further retirement. Sterling Barry was in California, directing the first stages of the erection of a block of university buildings in which he took great pride. Coningsby himself had suggested that when the Atlantic City job was finished there would be an opening for me there if I cared to make a bid for it. I did so care, and he promised to speak for me. Once I reached the Pacific, I was resolved not to come back for years, and perhaps never to come back at all.

It is lucky for me that I am temperamentally inclined to look forward. The retrospective view in my case would very soon have led me back to Greeley's Slip, but I was rarely inclined to dwell on it. Once when I was crossing the Atlantic as a small boy our steamer had run on the rocks at Cape Clear. To enable us to get off her before she slipped back into the water and went down,

long rope ladders were lowered to us from the top of the cliff, and up them we had to climb. This we did in a foggy Irish dawn, seeing just the rope rung ahead of us. Had we been able to look farther up the face of the cliff my mother and sisters would hardly have had the nerve for the ascent. As it was, they could see that single rung and no more, and so could keep their gaze upward without fear.

In the same way I kept my own gaze forward. I tried not to look ahead of the day, and at Atlantic City the days, even in November, were bearable enough. The booming of the long miles of breakers acted on me as a sedative. They dulled memory; they dulled pain; at the same time they incited me to work as the piercing wail of the bagpipes incites the Highlander to fight. I got companionship from them and a sense of timelessness. In their roll and tumble and crash I could hear the *poluphoisboio thalasses* in which Homer put the sound of breakers forever into speech.

So November went by, and a great part of December. Christmas was approaching, and I was eager to have it over. Not that it mattered to me; but the sense that there was a gay companionship in the world from which I was excluded got slightly on my nerves. Cantyre, who came down to spend a week-end with me whenever he could, having to go for that season to his relatives in Ohio, I looked for nothing more festal than a merry meal with Lovey.

The late afternoon on the day before Christmas Eve was both windy and foggy, with a dash of drizzle in the air. The men had knocked off working, and as I left the half-finished building I stood for a minute to get the puffs of wet wind in my face. The lights along the Board

Walk were reflected on the wet planks as in a blurred mirror. Here and there a pedestrian beat his way against the wind, and an occasional rolling-chair—the jinrikisha of Atlantic City—disappeared into the aureole of the sea-front.

As I came down our rickety temporary steps I became aware that a woman's figure darted out of the shelter of a pavilion on the shore edge and walked rapidly across toward me. She wore an ulster and a tam-o'-shanter cap, and made a gallant little figure in the wind. More than that I did not take time to notice, as I had no suspicion that she could have anything to do with me.

I was, in fact, turning southward toward the house where I was staying when she managed to beat her way in front of me.

"Don't you know me?"

I stopped in astonishment.

"Why—why, what are you doing here?"

"I was waiting for you."

I could think of nothing better to say than, "On an evening like this?"

"Oh, I don't mind that. We arrived only this afternoon. You see, my father can't get back from California, and mother wouldn't spend Christmas in town. We're not going to have any Christmas, and so—"

We struggled across the walk to the pavilion, which, though open on all sides, afforded at least an overhead protection.

"How did you know where to find me?" I asked, stupidly.

"Ralph Coningsby told me—and the time you would be coming out. I—I've something—something rather special to—to say to you."

I stood looking down at her. In the wooden ceiling above our heads there was an electric light that shed its beams through the whirl of mist right into her upturned face. There was a piteous quiver in the scarlet lips, and to the eyes had returned that mingling of compassion and amazement with which she had watched me when I pulled out her trinkets and threw them on the desk. It was the first time I had seen it since that night.

As I look back we seem to have gazed at each other in this way for an immeasurably long while, but I suppose it was only for some seconds. I knew why she was there. The truth had dawned on her at last, and she had come to tell me it wouldn't make any difference.

But it would.

I had left the revolver in my desk in town; but I reminded myself that there was a train between eight and nine and that I should have plenty of time to catch it.

CHAPTER XIV

FOR my own sake, rather than for Regina Barry's, I made an effort to escape from the pitiless pavilion light overhead.

"You'll need to go back to your hotel. Sha'n't we walk along? Then you can tell me as we go."

The tramp through the gale and spray would have been exhilarating were it not that confidential things had to be thrown out into the tempest. As we left the pavilion, however, a voice floated toward me from the semi-darkness.

"Chair, boss?"

Another minute and we were seated side by side in the odd little vehicle—something between a baby's perambulator and a touring-car—with the leather curtains buttoned to protect us, and a view through the wind-shield of a long line of lights shining into fog. There was a minute of surprise in the fact that, involuntarily expecting to go at a heightened speed, we found ourselves literally creeping at the snail's pace which was the customary gait of our pusher.

But that was only subconscious. I took note of it without taking note of it, to remember it when I pieced the circumstances together on returning home. The one thing of which I was really aware was that in this curious conveyance I was seated at her side, and able, as she sat half turned toward me, to look her in the eyes.

Now that we were there, she lost some of her self-

possession. After the months in which I had been afraid of her she seemed suddenly to have become afraid of me. Crouching back into her corner of the chair, she grew small and apologetic.

"Mother made me come. She said some one ought to tell you."

It was like a little cry—the cry of a child confessing before it is accused. I could follow her mental action. She wanted me to understand that nothing but *force majeure* would have induced her to waylay a man as he was coming home from work and take him in a kind of ambush.

Having once already talked with her at cross-purposes, I was careful to let her state her message before betraying my conviction of what it was to be.

"It's very kind of Mrs. Barry," I began, vaguely.

"You see, she likes you," she broke in, impulsively. "If you had any one belonging to you in this country I dare say she— But she's awfully maternal, mother is; and when Annette told her—"

"What did Annette tell her?"

"That's it. Oh, Mr. Melbury, I'm so sorry that I should be the one to bring the news."

"If it's bad news," I said, encouragingly, "I'd rather have you to share it with me than any one else in the world."

She asked, abruptly, "Have you heard anything from home—lately?"

I had once more the sensation of the blood rushing back to my heart and staying there. All I could do was to shake my head.

"That's what Annette thought. We told her she ought to write to you."

In my excitement I clutched her by the hand, but I think she was hardly aware of the act any more than I.

"But what is it?"

"It's—it's about your father."

"He's not—he's not—dead?"

She fell back again into her corner of the chair, withdrawing her hand. I, too, fell back into my corner, staring out through the wind-shield. Knowing that by not saying no she was really saying yes, I was obliged not only to get possession of the fact, but to control my sense of it.

I may say at once that it was the first sudden shock of my life. Every other trial had come to me by degrees —I had more or less seen it on the way and had been ready to meet it. This was something I had hardly ever thought of. That it might happen some time had been vaguely in the back of my mind, of course; but I had never considered it as an event of the day and hour. Now that it had occurred, my mental heavens seemed to fall.

I have told you so little of my family life that you hardly realize the degree to which my father was its center and support. My memory cannot go back to the time when he was not an important man, not only in the estimation of his children, but in that of the entire country. One of the youngest of that group of men who in the 'sixties and 'seventies took the scattered colonies of Great Britain lying north of the border of the United States and welded them into a gigantic, prosperous whole, he had outlived all but the sturdiest of his contemporaries. With Macdonald, Mount Stephen, Strathcona and a few others he had had the vision of a new white man's empire stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the

Great Lakes to the Arctic, and through good times and evil he had never let it go. That there were evil times as well as good ones is a matter of history; but however dark the moment, my father was one of those who never lost for a fraction of an instant his belief in ultimate success. In helping to build up the vast financial system of the Canadian Pacific Railway there was no door, in Europe or America, where money could be borrowed at which he did not knock. There were days when the prospect was so hopeless and the treasury so empty that he was obliged to pledge everything he possessed, and after that to use nothing but his honor and his name. The winning out is one of the fairy-tales of the modern world. He had begun to reap his reward just as my memory of him opens. Of his days of struggle I knew only by hearsay. By the time I was five he was already a man of considerable wealth, honored throughout the Dominion, honored in Great Britain, and one of the eight or ten Canadian baronets created by the Queen.

I see him as tall, spare, and vigorous, with thin, clear-cut, clean-shaven features, a piercing eye, and a mouth that sagged at the corners not from dejection, but from determination. Spartan in his own life, he required his children to be Spartan in theirs. Though with our added means our manner of living increased in dignity, it gained little in the way of luxury; and many were the shifts to which my brothers and I were pushed to indulge the follies of young men.

My brothers did this no more than experimentally, covering their tracks and returning to right ways before their digressions could be noticed. I was invariably caught, coming in for some dramatic moments with my father, which increased in tension with the years. I have often

wondered what his own youth could have been that he had so little mercy on what was at first not much worse than high spirits and boisterousness. Though I am far from blaming any one but myself for my ultimately going wrong, I have sometimes thought that a gentler handling might have led me aright when sheer repression only made me obstinate. That gentler handling my mother would have given me had not my father felt that it was weak. This knowledge only added to my perversity, the result being a state of continuous rebellion on my part and permanent displeasure on his.

"You're getting in worse and worse with the old man," my brother Jack warned me a few months before I left Montreal for good. "I heard him telling mother that if you didn't turn over a new leaf he'd cut you out of his will."

The information that he had so cut me out was the last form of appeal he ever made to me. I didn't believe he meant it otherwise than as a bluff—a stroke of the pen could have reinstated me; but merely as a bluff it angered me. It implied that I might be induced to do for money what I hadn't done for love or duty, and I was foolish enough to consider it part of my manhood to prove that any one who so judged me was mistaken. In that phase of my misguided life there was a kind of crazy, Cordelia-like attempt to show my father that it was not because of his money that I cared for him—or didn't care for him; but all I succeeded in doing was to rouse the resentment of a man who had hardly ever been defied.

But I had repented of that kind of bravado long before I had repented of anything else. My letter to him in October had been quite sincere. To be

cut out of his will had never meant anything to me but the loss of his affection. I was sorry for that loss, sorrier than any words I have could tell you. But when he wrote to me, in answer to my October letter, I knew from his tone that I had definitely killed whatever had once existed between him and me, and that all that was left for me was to bury it. I had been trying to bury it for the past eight weeks, and I do not deny that the effort was a bitter one.

You must understand that I had now come in for a set of emotions that had not belonged to me before I went to the Down and Out. I can explain it only on the ground that months of abstinence from anything that could inflame the senses or disturb the poise of the mind had induced a sanity of judgment to which I had been a stranger. In this new light I was really a prodigal son—not from any hope of a ring on my hand or the fatted calf, but genuinely from affection for the parents I had wronged.

To have this impulse to arise and go to my father thrown back on itself was the hardest thing in my experience. Somehow I had kept the conviction that if ever I repented that door would be open to my return. It had not really occurred to me that they wouldn't say at home, "It is meet that we should make merry and be glad." That my brothers might refuse to join in the chorus was a possibility. That my sister might not be over-enthusiastic in doing so I should be able to understand. But that my father and mother . . . Throughout my stay in Atlantic City I had been saying to myself, "Well, if I've thrust a sword into your hearts, old dears, you've jolly well thrust one into mine; and so we're quits."

"When did it happen?" was the first question I was sufficiently master of myself to ask.

"Annette heard yesterday. I think it was the day before."

"Do you know if—if he'd been ill?"

"He hasn't been well for a long time, Annette says—not for two or three years; but the end was—well, it was heart failure. He was in his motor—going home. When the car drove up to the door they found him—"

It was the picture thus presented that made me put my hand to my forehead and bow my head. I was thinking of him seated in his corner of the car, stately, unbending, unpardoning, dead. I was thinking of the plight of my poor little mother when the man she had for so many years worshiped and obeyed was no longer there to give her his commands. I was thinking of the commotion in the family, of the stir of interest throughout the community. A prince and a great man would have fallen in Israel, and all our Canadian centers would be aquiver with the news. Jerry and Jack would cable to my sister in England, as well as to our uncles and aunts in that country and in the United States. There were cousins and friends who wouldn't be forgotten. I alone was left out.

That was, however, more than I could believe. It was more, too, than I was willing to allow Regina Barry to suppose.

"There must be a telegram for me at my rooms in New York," I managed to stammer, though I fear my tone lacked conviction.

To this she said nothing. She had, in fact, as Cantyre informed me later, already ascertained that up to the hour of her departure from New York there was none.

I talked to Cantyre on the telephone immediately on returning to my hotel. He said that, though in my rooms there were some odds and ends of mail matter which he hadn't yet forwarded, there was no telegram or Canadian letter. Having called up Annette, I got a repetition of the meager information Miss Barry had given me, though I learned in addition that the funeral was to take place on the following day, which would be Christmas Eve. Her father had already gone to Montreal to take part in the ceremony. The embarrassment of her tone in saying she was surprised that I had received no announcement told me that she was not surprised. It was the last touch to the certainty that I had been omitted with intention.

After that, for a time, my grief gave place to rage. The punishment was so much greater than the crime that my heart cried out against its injustice. Had I stayed down in the depths where I was I should have accepted it phlegmatically; but having made the effort to rise, and made it with some success . . .

I acquitted my mother and my sister of any share in the injury done to me. My mother was the tenderest little creature God ever made, but she had always been under the domination of my father, and had now come under that of her sons. Never having asserted herself, she would hardly begin to do it at this date, though she might weep her heart out in secret. I knew my sister would put in a good word for me, but as the youngest of the family and a girl she would easily be overruled.

Jack might be mercifully inclined, but he would do as Jerry insisted. Jerry—who as Sir Gerald Melbury would now cut a great swath as head of the family—Jerry would be my father over again. He would be my father over

again, only on a smaller scale. My father was tyrannical by instinct; Jerry would be so by imitation. My father believed his word to be law because he didn't know how to do anything else; Jerry would believe his word to be law in order to be like my father. My father wouldn't forgive me because I had outraged his affections; Jerry wouldn't forgive me because my father hadn't done it first. As far as he could bring it about, my future would be locked and sealed with my father's death, not because he, Jerry, would be so shocked at my way of life, but because the laws of the Medes and Persians alter not.

Nothing remained for me, then, but to grin and bear it, and bide my time. That I had friends of my own was to me a source of that kind of consolation which is largely pride. Cantyre and the Coningsbys, Regina Barry and her mother—came closer to me now than any one with whom I had ties of blood. "Our relatives," George Sand writes somewhere, "are the friends given us by Nature; our friends are the relatives given us by God."

As relatives given me by God I regarded Lovey and Christian and Colonel Straight and Pyn and Beady Lamont and all that band of humble, helpful pals to whom I was knit in the bonds of the "robust love" which was the atmosphere of brave old Walt Whitman's City of Friends. There was no pose among them, nor condemnation, nor severity. Forgiveness was exercised there till seventy times seven. They forbore one another in love, and endeavored to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace to a degree of which Some One would have said that He had not found the like, no, not in Israel.

My family were all of Israel, and of the strictest sect. They fasted twice in the week, so to speak; in theory, if

not in practice, they gave tithes of all that they possessed; they could sincerely thank God that they were not as such men as composed the Down and Out; and yet it was precisely among those who smote their breasts and didn't dare so much as to lift up their eyes unto heaven that I found the sympathy that raised me to my feet and bade me be a man. No wonder, then, that that evening I kept poor old Lovey near me, that I took him down to the café, where there were only men, and made him dine with me, and told him of my bereavement.

"Is he, now?" he said, drawing a melancholy face. "No one can't live forever, can they? He'd have been an old, aged man, I expect."

I told him my father's age.

"Ah, well, at that time of life they gits carried off. Too bad you didn't know in time for the funeral. Ye'd 'ave liked to see him laid away safe underground, wouldn't ye, Slim? I 'ope he was in some good benefit club, like, that 'll take care of the expenses of burial. Awful dear, coffins is; but I suppose your family has a plot in some churchyard."

When I had assured him that this was the case he continued: "And as for goin' off sudden—well, it's awful 'ard on relations when a old, ancient man 'll lay round sick and don't know when 'is time's come. I've knowed 'em when you'd swear they hung on a-purpose, just to spite them as 'ad to take care of 'em. I 'ad a grandfather o' me own—well, you'd think that old man just couldn't die. Ninety, I believe he was, and a wicked old thing when he got silly, like. Take the pepper, he would, and pour it into the molasses-jug, and everything like that. Terr'ble fun he was for us young ones, especially one day when he dressed all up in 'is Sunday

clothes and went out in the street without 'is pants. I don't suppose yer guv'nor ever did the like o' that, Slim. Don't seem as if old people on this side 'ad them playful ways."

In this sort of reminiscence the evening went by, and in the morning I received a note that did much to comfort me. It was no more than the conventional letter of condolence from Mrs. Barry, but it was tactfully couched.

"A loss like yours," she wrote, "painful as it is at all times, becomes tragically so when the support one finds in family ties is too far away to sustain one. I have often found in my own experience that loneliness added a more poignant element to grief. I wish you would remember, dear Mr. Melbury, that you have friends at this Christmas-time quite near you. Run in and see us whenever you feel the need of a friendly word. We are leading a life here absolutely without engagements, and you will cheer us up more than we can cheer you. If on Christmas Eve you would care to look in between four and five you would find us here, and we could give you a cup of tea."

Needless to say all through the day of Christmas Eve my thoughts were with the gathering in our house on the slopes of Mount Royal. I saw in fancy every detail of the lugubrious pomp through which Christians contradict their Saviour in his affirmation that there is no death. Solemnity, blackness, muffled drums, and long lines of men throwing awe into their faces—would smite the heart with a sense of the final, the irreparable, the gone and lost. Flowers would lend a timid touch of brightness, but they would bloom in little more than irony. The roll of many wheels, the tramp of many feet, and a funeral service in

which the triumphant note itself would be turned into a dirge, these would be the massive accompaniment to the few sobs welling up from hearts in which they would be irrepressible. Though shut out in person, in spirit I was there, standing in the shrouded room, witnessing my mother's farewell kiss, watching the lid placed on the coffin, marching with my brothers, kneeling in the church, hearing the clods fall in the grave. At the very moment when Mrs. Barry handed me a cup of tea I was saying to myself, "Now it is all over, and they are coming back to the darkened, empty house."

I was not cheerful as a companion, and apparently no one expected me to be so. We can scarcely be said to have talked; we merely kept each other company. It was Miss Barry herself who suggested, when we had finished tea, that she and I should take a walk.

The weather had grown clear, bright, and windless. All along the promenade there was Christmas in the shops and in the air. It was not like any Christmas I had ever known before, with the blare, the lights, the gay, homeless people, and the thundering of breakers under starlight; but some essential of the ancient festival was present there, and it reached me. It reached me with a yearning to have something belonging to me that I could claim as my own—something to which I should belong and that wouldn't cast me off—something that would love me, something that I should love, with a love different from that with which even the City of Friends could supply me.

But out on the crowded, starry sea-front we neither walked nor talked. We sauntered and kept silent. On my side, I had the feeling that there was so much to say that I could say nothing; on hers, I divined that there

was the same. I will not affirm that in view of all the circumstances I could be anything but uneasy; and yet I was ecstatic. This wonderful creature was beside me, comforting me, liking to be with me! But if she knew exactly who I was . . .

I was swept by an intense longing that she should be told. It was a longing I was never free from, though it didn't often seize me so imperiously as to-night. It seized me the more imperiously owing to the fact that I could see her moving farther and farther away from any recollection and realization coming through herself. I had hoped that both would occur to her without my being obliged to say in so many words, "I am the man who tried a few months ago to steal your jewelry."

But if ever the shadow of this suggestion crossed her mind, it didn't cross it now. From the beginning the face and figure of that man had been blurred behind the memory of my brother Jack. Recent events had fixed me, just as she saw me, definitely in conditions in which sneak-thieving is unimaginable. I was the son of Sir Edward Melbury, Baronet, of Montreal and Ottawa, a man who would rank among the notables of the continent. Though a son in disfavor, I was still a son, and moreover I was exercising an honorable craft with some credit. I might propose to her, I might marry her, I might live my whole life with her, and the chances were that she would never connect me with the man she had seen for a few hurried minutes on pulling the rose-colored hangings aside.

For this very reason it seemed to me I must tell her before our friendship went any further. It was an additional reason that I began to think that the information would be a shock to her. How I got that impression

I can scarcely tell you; the ways in which it was conveyed to me were so trifling, so infinitesimal.

For example, I asked her one day what she meant by her oft-repeated statement that I was different from other men.

"Our men," she explained, promptly, "have no life apart from their businesses and professions. Business and profession are stamped all over them. They are in their clothes, their faces, the tones of their voices. You'd know Ralph Coningsby was an architect, and Stephen Cantyre a doctor, and Rufus Legrand a clergyman, the minute you heard them speak. Now you wouldn't know what you were. You might be anything — anything a gentleman can be, that is. I've heard some one say that Oxford is a town in a university, and Cambridge a university in a town. In just the same way my father, for instance, is a man in an architect. You're an architect in a man. With you the man is the bigger. With us he's the smaller. It isn't merely business before pleasure; it's business before human nature; and somehow I've a preference for seeing human nature put first."

There was little in this to say what I have just hinted at. There was barely sufficient to let me see that she was putting me above most of her men acquaintances, in a place in which I had no right to be. Though it was as far as she ever went, it was far enough to create my suspicion and to make me feel that the earliest confession would not come too soon.

When we got down to the less frequented end of the Board Walk the moment seemed to have arrived. The crowd had thinned out to occasional groups of stragglers or lovers going two and two. Only here and there one

came on a shop; only here and there on a hotel. One got an opportunity to see the stars, and to hear the ocean as something more than a drumbeat to the blare.

By a simultaneous movement we paused by the rail, to look down on the dim, white, moving line of breakers. It was one of those instants when between two people drawn closely to each other something leaps. Had there been nothing imperative to keep us apart I should have seized her in my arms; she would have nestled there. I had distinctly the knowledge that she would have responded to anything—and that the initiative was mine.

As a rocket that bursts into cascades of fire suddenly goes out, so suddenly the moment passed, leaving us with a sense of coldness, primarily due to me.

Somewhat desperately I began: "Do you know what has made the difficulties between me and my family?"

She was gazing off toward the dark horizon.

"Vaguely."

"Do you know that for years I gave them a great deal of trouble?"

"Vaguely."

"Do you know that—"

"Do you know," she interrupted, quietly, "that I used to have a brother?"

The question so took me by surprise that I answered, blankly, "No."

"Yes, I had. He was nearly ten years older than I, which would make him about your age. He was — he was wild."

"And is he—is he dead?"

"He shot himself—about five years ago. It was a terrible story, and I don't want to tell it to you. I only want to say that my mother feels that if—if father hadn't

been so hard on him—if he'd played him along gently—he might easily have been saved. It's what Mr. Christian—he's had great experience in that sort of thing—he does a wonderful work among men that have gone under—but it's what he used to tell father; only father hadn't nearly so much patience with his own son as he would have had with some one else's, and so— I wonder if you can understand that when mother heard that you had been—had been—well, a little like my brother—"

"Who told her?"

"Oh, I don't know. These things get about. It might have been Annette."

"And assuming that I was what you call wild, have you any idea how wild I was?"

Her response to this was to say: "I like a man to have spirit. The men who always keep on the safe side—" She left this sentiment there, to add, less irrelevantly than it sounded: "Mother wants you to come and dine with us to-morrow evening. It will be Christmas Day, but we sha'n't keep it as Christmas. We don't have any Christmases since—since Tony died. We simply—we simply sha'n't be alone."

In the turn our talk had taken there was so much human need that I found my efforts at confession paralyzed. That a family whom I had regarded as enviably care-free should be living in the shadow of a great tragedy, and nursing a sorrow in which there was this element of remorse, was curiously illuminating as a discovery. It seemed to cast into other people's lives the sort of sharp revealing ray that a flash of lightning throws on a dark road. Here was a girl whom I had thought of hitherto as immune from the more sordid varieties of trial; and yet she had at least tasted of their cup. It gave me a

new conception of her. I began to see her not as a flat surface or as static like a portrait, but as a living, palpitating human being with duties round her and a vista of experiences as background.

The immediate inference was that I must assist them over Christmas, as they would assist me; and to do that I must put off telling Regina Barry where she had seen me first.

To be quite free, however, I had to get a kind of permission from Lovey. My relations with him had grown to be peculiar. He seemed to develop two personalities, from the one to the other of which he glided more or less unconsciously. Though even in our privacy he refused any longer to speak of us as buddies and fellas together, he called me Slim and sonny, and referred without hesitation to our fraternal past. On my part I found it almost consoling, in view of the bluff I was putting up, to have some one near me who knew me at my worst. Where I had to pretend before others there was no pretense at all with him; and so I got the relief that comes at any time when one can drop one's mask.

Here in Atlantic City I was paying all his expenses, but no wages. In New York I offered him nothing but his room. How he lived I didn't always know, beyond the fact that it was honestly. As to this he was so frank that I could have little doubt about it.

"There's many a good thing I lets go by, Slim, all on account o' you. Washin' windows ain't nothink but old woman's work when a man's been a 'atter. If it wasn't to save you, sonny—"

"Yes, I know, Lovey. One of these days I may get a chance to make it up to you."

"Oh, well, as for makin' it up, so long as you goes on

with the fancy you took to me that night at Stinson's, like—"

"Oh, I do. You see that, don't you?"

"Yes; I see it right enough, Slim. It kind o' passes the buck on me, as you might say. But there! Lord love ye, I don't complain! Ye're a fine young fella, and what I does for you—self-denial ye might call it—I don't grudge. When I sees ye goin' round like a swell with other swells I just says to myself, 'Lovey, that's your work, old top'; and I feels kind o' satisfied."

It was kind o' satisfied that he showed himself when I told him I had been asked to eat my Christmas dinner with Mrs. and Miss Barry.

"Ain't that grand!" he commented, exultingly. "Ye'll put on them swell togs—"

"But it will leave you alone, Lovey," I reminded him.

"Lord love ye, Slim, I don't mind that! What's Christmas to me? I don't pay no attention to all that foolishness—except the plum puddin'."

I felt it right to throw out a warning.

"In your dining-room, Lovey, with all the chauffeurs, there'll be things to drink, very likely."

He put on his melancholy face.

"It won't make no difference to me, Slim. The Down and Out has got me bound by so many promises, like, that I can't take a sip o' nothink, not no more than a dead man that's got a bottle in 'is coffin. I'm one that can take it or leave it, as I feel inclined."

"If you're going to try taking it or leaving it to-morrow I sha'n't accept Mrs. Barry's invitation to dinner."

The effect was what I had expected.

"You go to the dinner, Slim, my boy, and I'll let you see me 'ittin' the 'ay before you starts."

"But you could hit the hay and get out of bed again."

"No; because I'll make you lock the door. I ain't a-goin' to 'ave ye 'ave no hanxiety on my account."

So we settled it—not that I was to lock him in, but that he was to guarantee me against being anxious; and I suppose Christian would say that another bit of victory was scored.

CHAPTER XV

A FEW days later I learned that my father had established a small trust fund for my benefit, and that the income was to be paid to me quarterly. He had thus, after all, recognized me as his son, though not on the footing of his other sons. Each of his other sons would have— But I won't go into that. It is enough to say that for every dollar I should receive Jerry and Jack would have twenty or thirty, and so would my sisters. Even in my mother's life interest I was not to have a share when she no longer needed it.

Among the many sins I have to confess, that of being specially mercenary is not one. I make this affirmation in order that you may not condemn me too severely when I say that for days I labored under a sense of outrage. Mine was the state of mind common among evil-doers who object to paying the penalty of which they have had fair warning. My father had told me with his own mouth that on account of certain indulgences which I had refused to give up he had cut me off altogether. I had chosen to take my own way and to brave the consequences; and now when the latter proved to be not so bad as I had been bidden to expect I was indignant.

When I informed Andrew Christian of the bequest I added that I had practically made up my mind to refuse it. He gave me that look which always seemed about to tell you a good joke.

"Why do you think he left you anything?"

"I suppose he wanted to feel that if the worse came to the worst I shouldn't be quite penniless."

"But why should he want to feel that?"

"Well, hang it all, sir, when everything is said and done I was his son!"

"You were his son, and he—he cared for you."

"He cared for me to—to that extent."

"And considering your attitude toward him, could you expect him to care for you more?"

I said, unwillingly, "No, I suppose not."

"Could you expect him to care for you as much?"

"I—I'd given up thinking he cared for me at all."

"And this shows he did. In spite of all you made him suffer—and, what was probably worse in his eyes, made your mother suffer—he loved you still. I know you're not thinking of the money, Frank."

"No, I'm not; and that's perfectly sincere."

"You're thinking of his affection for you; and now you're assured of it. The amount of money he left you is secondary. That, and the way in which he left it to you, were determined by something else."

I looked at him hard as I said, "And what was that?"

His look as he answered me was frank, straight, and fearless.

"The fact that he didn't trust you." I suppose he must have seen how I winced, for he went on at once: "That's about the bitterest pill fellows like us have to swallow. In addition to everything else that we bring on ourselves we forfeit other people's confidence. There's the nigger in the woodpile, even when we buck up. Your father was fond of you, Frank; but he was afraid that if he did for you all he would have done if you'd gone

straight it would only send you to the devil. Don't you see that?"

With some relief as well as some reluctance I admitted that I did.

"It takes years, Frank, old boy, for men who've been where you and I have been to build up a life which gives a reasonable promise of making good. In seven or eight months you've done splendidly. I don't know that we've ever had a fellow in the club whose been more game—"

"It's the club that's been game."

"True; but you've got out of it the best that it can give. I'll say that for you. Only don't imagine for a moment that your fight is over."

"Oh no, sir; I don't."

"It's perfectly true that if you resist the devil he will flee from you; but he can show a marvelous power of coming back. Some of your toughest tussles lie ahead. Now I'm only reminding you of that to show you that your father has perhaps done the very wisest thing for you. A large part of your safety lies in the necessity for your working. If you weren't absolutely obliged to do it in order to live like a respectable man there's no telling what tide of suppressed temptations might rush in and engulf you."

I nodded slowly.

"I see that. Thank you for pointing it out to me."

"But, Frank, old fellow, that's not the chief thing I want you to see. What will give you more satisfaction than anything else is the knowledge that what has been done for you has been done in love. Your father has shown his love for you; you show your love for him. Accept this gift graciously. Enjoy it and make the best of it. Your life with him isn't over."

My expression must have been one of inquiry, because he went on:

"One of the sublimest and truest things that ever fell from a pen is this, 'Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.' It's almost a startling thing to realize that by the sheer act of love we're sons of God and know Him."

"Ah, but what kind of love?" I asked, with some incredulity.

"Are there more kinds than one? The kingdom of love is like that of minerals or that of vegetation—one in essence, though multiform in manifestation. Just as one will give us coal and diamonds with much the same ingredients, and another the strawberry, the rose, and the apple-tree, all closely akin, so love shows itself in a million ways, and yet remains always love."

"And would you say that the love of parents and children, the love of husbands and wives, the love of sweethearts, and the love of God—"

"—are all fundamentally related? Yes, I would. I can't understand love in any other sense, if it's to be real love. Do you remember how often we've talked of the spirit there is in the world that throws dust into our eyes by creating distinctions and confusions where neither confusion nor distinction exists? Well, the same evil imp is forever at work to stultify love by trying to take the meaning from the word. And when it has stultified love it has stultified God, since the one is identical with the other."

I became argumentative.

"But if all love is identical with God, how do you account for what would commonly be called a wrong love?"

"There's no such thing as a wrong love. Men are wrong and women are wrong, and they treat love wrongly; but love itself is always right. There a distinction must be made between love and passion; but it's easy enough to make it. One of these days we'll take the time to talk that over. At present my point is simply this—that there's only one love as there's only one God, and it's only by understanding the unity of both that we get the significance of either. Moreover, the same pen that wrote, 'Every one that loveth is born of God,' wrote, 'He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God.' You see then how magical a thing love is, and why any kind of love—remember I'm speaking of love, not of physical passion, which is another thing—but you can see how any kind of love should work wonders." He asked, suddenly, "Have you written to your mother since your father died?"

I said I had not, that I hadn't supposed a letter from me would be welcome.

"Don't ask whether it would be welcome or not. Do your duty—and let other people take care of theirs. Let your mother see that, so far from feeling sore over the provision in your father's will, you take it in the way I've tried to indicate. It will be an amazing comfort to her; and if you want to give your brothers and sisters the surprise of their young lives you'll be doing it." He took my hand and pressed it. "Good-by now, old chap. I've got to go and see Momma about the meals for tomorrow."

He passed on to the kitchen, where a Greek named Pappa—nicknamed Momma by the boys—had taken the place of Mouse; but he left me with a new outlook.

Following his instructions, I began almost immediately

to get some of the reward he promised me. My mother wrote to me within a week, timidly but tenderly, and with joy at being in touch with me again. A few weeks later my sister wrote, affectionately, if with reserve. When my birthday came in March, and I was thirty-two, I had small presents from them both, and from my two sisters-in-law as well. I noticed that all letters, even from my mother, were hesitatingly expressed, and in something like an undertone of awe. My family, too, felt apparently that I had put an abyss between myself and them, and that in the effort to recross it there was a suggestion of the supernatural. It was as if my father were saying to them, "This, thy brother, was dead, and is alive again"—and they were experiencing some of the strangeness that Mary and Martha must have known when Lazarus came back to the house at Bethany.

But that was not my only reward, though of what I received in addition I find it difficult to tell you. Indeed, I should make no attempt to tell you at all were it not so essential to this small record of a human life. All I want to say is that that thing came to me as a new revelation which is probably an every-day fact to you—that by the simple process of loving I could dwell in God, I could be aware that God was all round me.

I mean that once I understood that love was God the great mystery that had tantalized me all my life was solved. All my life I had been tortured by the questions: Who is God? What is God? What is my relation to Him—or have I any? And now I seemed to have found the answer. When I got back to love—the common, natural love for my father and mother and sisters—when I got back to feeling more gently toward my brothers—I began to see—you must forgive me if I seem blatant,

but that is not my intention—I began to see faintly and very inadequately that I was actually in touch with God.

I am far from saying that all my difficulties were overcome. Of course they were not. I mean only that that divine force of which I had been told the universe was full, but which had always seemed apart from me, remote from my needs, actually came, in some measure at least, within my possession. Just as Beady Lamont found the furniture-moving business shiny with it, once he knew where to look for it, so I began to see my work as an architect. It was as if a golden key had been put into my hand which unlocked the richest of life's secrets.

All at once people whom I had known to be well disposed toward me, and whom I had dismissed at that, began to translate God to me. Ralph Coningsby, Cantyre, Lovey, Christian, Pyn, not to speak of others, were like reflectors that threw the rays of the great Central Sun straight into my soul. I am not declaring that there was no tarnish on the surfaces that caught those beams and transmitted them to me—probably there was—but light and warmth were poured into me for all that. Not that there was a change in their attitude toward me; the change was in my point of view, in my capacity for seeing. What I had thought of only as human aid I now perceived to be the celestial bread and wine; and where I had supposed I was living only with men, I knew I was walking with God.

And yet there was a love with regard to which I could not have this peace of mind. Christian would perhaps have ascribed that defect to the fact that there was passion in it. My own fear was that, having had its inception in a moment of crime, it could never free itself from the conditions that gave it birth.

After the Christmas dinner there was a change toward me in the bearing of Regina Barry and her mother. Without growing colder, they became slightly more formal; and that I understood. As they had come so far in my direction, it was for me to go some of the distance in theirs, and I didn't.

I didn't because I couldn't. I was like a man who would have been glad to walk if paralysis hadn't nailed him to his seat. As, however, it was emotional paralysis and not physical, there was no means by which they could become aware of it; nor could I make up my mind to tell them.

For quite apart from my damnable secret was the common, every-day fact that I had no income sufficient to maintain a wife in anything like the comfort to which Regina Barry had been accustomed. Though she might have accepted what I had to offer, I felt the usual masculine scruples as to offering it. This, too, was something that couldn't be explained unless there was some urgent need of the explanation; and so when I was mad to go forward I had, to my shame and confusion, to hang back.

Their retreat was managed with tact and dignity. During the week after Christmas I saw them on a number of occasions, always by invitation, though I had no further talk with Regina Barry alone. Two or three times I guessed she would have been willing to go out to walk with me, but I didn't suggest it. As she had proposed it once, she could hardly do so a second time, and so we sat tamely in a sitting-room. Like that minute on Christmas Eve when she would have flown into my arms had I opened them, other minutes came and went; and I saw my coldness reacting on her visibly.

At the end of ten days a note told me that they had returned to New York, apologizing for the fact that they had not had time to bid me good-by. Though seeing plainly enough the folly of a correspondence, I wrote in response to that note, hoping that a correspondence might ensue. But I got no answer. I got nothing. Not so much as a message was sent to me on the days when Ralph Coningsby came down.

I did not resent this; I only suffered. I suffered the more because of supposing that she suffered too. And yet when I next saw her I found nothing to support that theory.

When I went to New York for a few days in February I called, but they were not at home. Having left my card, I waited for a message that would name an hour when I should find them; but I waited in vain. During the four days my visit lasted I heard nothing kindlier than what Cantyre repeated, that they were sorry to have been out when I came.

As I sent them flowers before leaving the city, a note from Mrs. Barry thanked me for them cordially; but there was not a syllable in it that gave me an excuse for writing in response. Reason told me that it was better that it should be so, but reason had ceased to be sufficient as a guide.

In March I made an errand that took me to town for a week-end, and on the Sunday afternoon I called again at the house which had so curiously become the focusing-point of my destiny. Miss Barry was at home and receiving. I found her with two or three other people, and she welcomed me as doubtless she had welcomed them. Even when I had outstayed them she betrayed none of that matter-of-course intimacy which had marked

her attitude toward me in December. She seemed to have retired behind all sorts of mental fortifications over which I couldn't at first make my way.

When we were seated in the style of Darby and Joan at the opposite corners of a slumbering fire she told me her father had made one hurried visit from California, and that, now that he had returned to the Pacific coast, she and her mother were thinking of joining him there. Should they do so, they would probably remain till it was time to go to Long Island in June. Two or three protestations against this absence came to my lips, but of course I couldn't utter them.

I could have sworn that she was saying to herself, "You don't seem to care!" though aloud it became, "We've never been in California, and we want to see what it's like."

I seized the opportunity to rejoin, "You've a fancy for seeing what things are like, haven't you?"

She took up the challenge instantly. "Why do you say that?"

"Only because of what you've said at different times yourself."

"Such as?"

"I don't want to quote. I was thinking of the taste you've frequently acknowledged for making experiments."

"Experiments in things—or people?"

"I was thinking of people."

She marched right into my camp by saying, boldly, "Oh, you mean the number of times I've—I've broken engagements?"

"Perhaps I mean rather the number of times you've formed them."

"Did you ever buy a house?"

I replied with some wonder that I had not.

"Well, we've bought two—this one and the one at Rosyth. But before buying either we rented each for a season to see whether or not we liked it."

"And you did."

"But we've rented others which we didn't. So you see."

"I see that experiments are justified. Is that what you mean?"

"If one is satisfied with anything that comes along, by all means take it. But if one only wants what one wants—"

"And you know what you want?"

Her eyes were all fire; her lips had the daring scarlet of a poppy.

"I've never got beyond knowing what I don't want."

"That is, you've never taken anything up except in the long run to throw it down?"

"Your expressions are too harsh. One doesn't throw down everything one doesn't want. One sets it aside."

"And would it be discreet to ask why you—why you set certain things—and people—aside?"

She looked at the fire as if considering.

"Do you mean—men?"

"To narrow the inquiry down, suppose I say I do."

"And"—she threw me a swift, daring glance—"and marriage?"

"That defines the question still further."

Her words came as the utterance of long, long thoughts.

"One couldn't marry a man one didn't trust."

"No; of course not."

"Nor a milksop."

"You couldn't."

"Nor a man who wasn't a thoroughbred."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"Oh, don't you know? If not I can't explain. All I can say is that there are things a thoroughbred couldn't do."

"What sort of things?"

"Why should you want me to tell you? You know as well as I do. The things that make a man impossible—mean things—ignoble things."

"Criminal things?"

"Criminal things, too, I suppose. I don't know so much about them; but I do see a lot of meanness and pettiness and— Oh, well, the sort of lack of the fastidious in honor that—that puts a man out of the question."

"Aren't you very hard to please?"

"Possibly."

"And if you don't find what—what you're looking for?"

"I shall do without it, I suppose."

"And if you think you find it—and then discover that, after all—"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know. I've never been absolutely disillusioned so far. When disillusion has come to me—as it has—I could see it on the way. But if I—I cared for some one and found I was deceived in him— But what's the use in talking of it?" she laughed. "Please don't think I'm putting forth a claim to be treated better than the average. It's only when I see the average—"

"The average of men?"

"No, the average of women. When I see what they're willing to take—and marry—and live with—I can only say that I find myself very well off as I am."

This conversation did not make it easier for me to go back to the starting-point of our acquaintance; but the moment came when I did it.

CHAPTER XVI

I DID not, however, do it that spring, since the event that compelled me at last to the step took up all my attention.

It was toward the end of April that I received a telegram signed by my sister's name:

"Mother seriously ill. Wants to see you. Come at once."

In spite of my alarm at this summons I saw the opportunity of putting up a good front before my relatives. Taking Lovey with me as valet, and stopping at the best hotel, I presented the appearance of a successful man.

Though anxiety on my mother's account made my return a matter of secondary interest, I could see the surprise and relief my apparent prosperity created. My brothers had been expecting one of whom they would have to be ashamed. Furthermore, they had not been too confident as to my attitude with regard to my father's will. Looking for me to contest it, they had suspected that behind my acquiescence lay a ruse. When they saw that there was none, that I made no complaint, that I seemed to have plenty of money, that I traveled with a servant, that I had the air of a man of means—a curious note of wonder and respect stole into their manner toward me. I know that in private they were saying to each other that they couldn't make me out; and I gave them no help in doing so.

I gave them no help during all the month I remained in Montreal. I arranged with Coningsby to take that time, and my little stock of savings was sufficient to finance me. Though I was once more putting up a bluff, it was a bluff that I felt to be justified; and in the end it found its justification.

I have no intention of giving you the details of those four weeks of watching beside a bed where the end was apparent from the first. Now that I look back upon them, I can see that they were not without their element of happiness, since to my mother at least it was happiness to know that I was beside her. The joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth was on her face from the day I appeared, and never left it up to that moment when we took our last look at her dear smiling features.

When the lawyer came to read us her will I found, to my amazement, that she had left me everything she possessed.

It was then that I reaped that which I had sown at Andy Christian's suggestion. Since with a good grace I had accepted my father's will, the rest of the family could hardly do otherwise with regard to my mother's. She left a note saying that, had my father lived a few months longer, he would have seen that I had re-established myself sufficiently to be allowed to share equally with the rest of the family in what he had to leave; but, as it was too late for that, she was endeavoring to right the seeming injustice—which he had not meant as an injustice—as far as lay in her power. These words from her pen being much more emphatic than any I could remember from her lips, my brothers and sisters, whatever they felt inwardly, could only give their assent to them.

What my mother possessed included not only the per-

sonal estate she had inherited from her father, considerably augmented by her husband's careful management, but books, furniture, and jewelry. The books and furniture I made over to my sister to remain in the two houses, the one in Montreal, the other on the Ottawa. Some of the jewelry I gave to her, to my sister in England, and to my two sisters-in-law, though keeping the bulk for my wife—when I got one.

For I was now in a position to marry. Though my mother had had no great wealth, what she left me, together with the trust fund established by my father and what I earned, would assure me enough to live in at least as much comfort as Ralph Coningsby. I could, therefore, propose to Regina Barry and feel I could make a home for her.

I had again come to the conclusion that if I asked her she would accept me. I make no attempt to analyze this feeling on her part, because I saw plainly enough that it was founded on mistake. That is to say, having developed an ideal of the man whom she could marry, she had nursed herself into the belief that I came up to it, when, as a matter of fact, I did not.

Now I had seen enough of husbands and wives to know that in most marriages there is some such illusion as this, and that it can be successfully maintained for years. When the illusion itself has faded it can live on as the illusion of an illusion. By the time there is no illusion or shadow of illusion left at all it has ceased in the majority of cases to matter. Time has welded what mutual distaste might have put asunder, and the married state remains undisturbed.

I was, therefore, obliged to face the consideration that if I married the woman I loved she would probably never

discover what I felt it my duty to confess. Was it really, then, my duty to confess it? Since no one knew it but myself, was it not rather my duty to keep it concealed? Other men had secrets from their wives—especially those that concerned the days when they were unmarried—and all were probably the happier for the secrecy. Even Ralph Coningsby, who was the most model husband I could think of, had said that if he were to tell his wife all he could tell her about himself he would be ashamed to go home. There were weeks when I debated these questions every day and night, arriving at one conclusion by what I may call my rough horse sense, and at another by my instinct. Horse sense said, "Marry her and keep mum." Instinct warned, "You can never marry her and be safe and happy with such a secret as this to come between you."

Throughout this wavering of opinion I knew that when the time came I should act from instinct. It wasn't merely that I wanted to be safe; it was also that, all pros and cons apart, there was such a thing as honor. Not even to be happy—not even to make the woman I cared for happy—could I ignore that.

I am not sure how much Andrew Christian understood of the circumstances when, without giving him the facts or mentioning a name, I asked his advice. He only said:

"You've had some experience, Frank, of the potency of love, haven't you? Well, love has a twin sister—truth. In love and truth together there's a power which, if we have the patience to wait for its working out, will solve all difficulties and meet all needs."

My experiences during the past few months having given me some reason to believe this, I decided, so far as I came actively to a decision, to let it rule my course;

but in the end the critical moment came by what you would probably call an accident.

It was the last Sunday in June. My work in Atlantic City being over, Mrs. Grace had asked me to come down for the week-end to her little place in Long Island. It was not exactly a party, though there were two or three other people staying in the house. My chief reason for accepting the invitation—as I think it was the chief reason for its being given—was that the Barry family were in residence on the old Hornblower estate, which was the adjoining property.

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Grace and her guests were all asked to Idlewild, as the late Mrs. Hornblower had named her house, to Sunday lunch.

The path from the one dwelling to the other was down the gentle slope of Mrs. Grace's gardens, across a meadow, at the other side of which it joined the Idlewild avenue, and then up a steep hill to the rambling red-and-yellow house. Here one dominated the Sound for a great part of the hundred and twenty miles between Montauk Point and Brooklyn.

Sauntering idly through the hot summer noon, I found myself beside Mrs. Grace, while the rest of the party straggled on ahead. As my hostess was not more free than other women from the match-making instinct, it was natural that she should give to the conversation a turn that she knew would not be distasteful to me.

"She's a wonderful girl," she observed, "with just that danger to threaten her that comes from being over-fastidious."

"I know what you mean by her being over-fastidious; but why is it a danger?"

"In the first place, because people misunderstand her.

They've ascribed to light-mindedness what has only been the thing that literary people call the divine searching for perfection."

"And do you know the kind of thing she'd consider perfect?"

It was so stupid a question that I couldn't be surprised to see a gleam of quiet mischief in her glance as she replied, "From little hints she's dropped to me, quite confidentially, I rather think I do."

Fair men blush easily, but I tried to ignore the fact that I was doing it as I said, "That's quite a common delusion at one stage of the game; but suppose she were to find that she was mistaken?"

The answer shelved the question, though she did it disconcertingly: "Oh, well, in the case she's thinking of I don't believe she will."

I was so eager for data that I pushed the inquiry indiscreetly.

"What makes you so sure?"

"One can tell. It isn't a thing one can put into words. You know by a kind of intuition."

"Know what?"

"That a certain kind of person can never have had any but a certain kind of standard." She gave me another of those quietly mischievous glances. "I'll tell you what she said to me one day not long ago. She said she'd only known one man in her life—known him well, that is—of whom she was sure that he was a thoroughbred to the core."

"But you admitted at the beginning that that kind of conviction is a danger."

"It would be a danger if her friends couldn't bear her out in believing it to be justified."

Unable to face any more of this subtle flattery, I was obliged to let the subject drop.

The lunch was like any other lunch. As an unimportant person at a gathering where every one knew every one else more or less intimately, I was to some extent at liberty to follow my own thoughts, which were not altogether happy ones. For telling what I had to tell, the necessity had grown urgent. What was lacking, what had always seemed to be lacking, was the positive opportunity. This I resolved to seek; but suddenly I found it before me.

This was toward the middle of the afternoon, when the party had broken up. It had broken up imperceptibly by dissolving into groups that strolled about the lawns and descended the long flights of steps leading to the beach below. As I had not been seated near Miss Barry at table, it was no more than civil for me to approach her when the party was on the veranda and the lawn. Our right to privacy was recognized at once by a withdrawal of the rest of the company. It was probably assumed that I was to be the fourth in the series of experiments of which Jim Hunter and Stephen Cantyre had been the second and the third; and, though my fellow-guests might be sorry for me, they would not intervene to protect me.

Considering it sufficient to make their adieux to Mrs. Barry, they left us undisturbed in a nook of one of the verandas. Here we were out of sight of any of the avenues and pathways to the house, and Mrs. Barry was sufficiently in sympathy with our desire to be alone not to send any one in search of us. On the lawn robins were hopping, and along the edge of shorn grass the last foxgloves made upright lines of color against the olive-

green scrub-oak. Far down through the trees one caught the silvery glinting of water.

The sounds of voices and motor wheels having died away, Miss Barry said, languidly: "I think they must be all gone. They'll say I'm terribly rude to keep myself out of sight. But it's lovely here, isn't it? And this is such a cozy spot in which to smoke and have coffee. I read here, too, and— Oh, dear, what's happening?"

It was then that the little accident which was to play so large a part in my life occurred. She had leaned forward from her wicker chair to set her empty coffee-cup on the table. As she did so the string of pearls which she wore at the opening of her simple white dress loosened itself and slipped like a tiny snake to the floor of the veranda. From a corresponding chair on the other side of the table I sprang up and stooped. When I raised myself with the pearls in my right hand I slipped them into my pocket.

Between the fingers of my left hand I held a lighted cigar. Bareheaded, I was wearing white flannels and tennis shoes. Now that the moment had come, I felt extraordinarily cool—as cool as on the night when I had slipped this string of pearls into my pocket before. I looked down and smiled at her. Leaning back in her chair, she looked up and smiled at me.

I shall always see her like that—in white with a slash of silk of the red of her lips somewhere about her waist, and a ribbon of the same round her dashing Panama hat. Her feet in little brown shoes were crossed. With an elbow on the arm of her chair, she held a small red fan out from her person, though she wasn't actively using it.

"What does that mean?" she asked, idly, at last.

"Didn't you ever see any one put these pearls into his pocket before?"

"Doesn't it remind you of anything?"

"No—of nothing."

"Didn't you ever see any one put these pearls into his pocket before?"

"Why, no!" She added, as if an idea had begun to dawn in the back of her memory, "Not in that way."

"Oh, I remember. You didn't see him put them in at all. You only saw him take them out."

The smile remained on her features, but something puzzled gave it faint new curves.

"Why—"

"It was like this, wasn't it?"

I drew out the pearls and threw them on the table.

She bent forward slightly, still smiling, like a person watching with bewildered intensity a conjurer's trick.

"Why—"

"Only your gold-mesh purse was with them—and your diamond bar-pin—and your rings."

"Why—who, who on earth could have told you?"

I, too, continued to smile, consciously wondering if I should be as calm as this in the hour of death.

"Who do you think?"

"It wasn't Elsie Coningsby?"

"No. She was in the house, but—"

"How did you know that?" She uttered a mystified laugh. "She *was* there! It was one of the nights she stayed with me when papa and mamma were down here superintending some changes before we could move in. But I never told her anything about it."

"Why didn't you—when she was right on the spot?"

"Oh, because."

The smile disappeared. She stopped looking up at me to turn her eyes toward the foxgloves and scrub-oak.

"Yes? Because—what?"

"Because I promised—that man—I wouldn't."

"Why should you have made him such a promise?"

"Oh, I don't know. Just at the time I was—I was sorry for him."

"And aren't you sorry for him still?"

She looked up at me again with one of her bright challenges.

"Look here! Do you know him?"

"Tell me first what I asked you. Aren't you sorry for him still?"

"I dare say I am. I don't know."

"What did you—what did you—think of him at the time?"

"I thought he was—terrible."

"Terrible—in what way?"

"I don't know that I can tell you in what way. It was so awful to think that a man who had had some advantages should have sunk to that. If he'd been a real burglar—I mean a professional criminal—I should have been afraid of him; but I shouldn't have had that sensation of something meant for better things that had been debased."

"Didn't he tell you he was hungry?"

The smile came back—faintly.

"You seem to know all about it, don't you? It's the strangest thing I ever knew. No one in this world could have told you but himself. Yes, he did say he was hungry; but then, a man who'd been what he must have been shouldn't have got into that condition. He'd stolen into our pantry, poor creature, and drunk the cooking-wine. He told me that—" Without rising, her figure became alert with a new impulse. "Oh, I see!

You do know him. He was an Englishman. I remember that."

I placed myself fully before her. "No, he wasn't an Englishman."

"He spoke like one."

"So do I, for the matter of that."

"Then he was a Canadian. Was he?"

"He was a Canadian."

"Oh, then that accounts for it. But you did puzzle me at first. But how did you come to meet him? Was it at that Down and Out Club that papa and Mr. Christian are so interested in? You go to it, too, don't you? I think Stephen Cantyre said you did."

"Yes, I go to it, too."

She grew pensive, resting her chin on a hand, with her elbow on the arm of the chair.

"I suppose it's all right; but I never can understand how men can be so merciful to one other's vices. It looks as if they recognized the seed of them within themselves."

"Probably that's the reason."

"Women don't feel like that about one another."

"They haven't the same cause."

"I hope he's doing better—that man—and picking up again."

"He is."

She asked, in quite another tone, "You're not going back to New York to-morrow, are you?"

"I'm not sure—yet."

"Hilda said she was going to try to persuade you and the Grahams to stay till Tuesday. If you can stay, mamma and I were planning—"

I put myself directly in front of her, no more than a few feet away, my hands in the pockets of my jacket.

"Look at me again. Look at me well. Try to recall—"

Slowly, very slowly, she struggled to her feet. The color went out of her lips and the light from her eyes as she backed away from me in a kind of terror.

"What—what—are you trying to make me—to make me understand?"

"Think! How should I know all that I've been saying if—"

"If the man himself didn't tell you. But he did."

"No, he didn't. No one had to tell me."

She reached the veranda rail, which she clutched with one hand, while the other, clenched, was pressed against her breast.

"You don't mean—"

"Yes, I do mean—"

"Oh, you can't?"

"Why can't I."

"Because—because it isn't—it isn't possible! You"—she seemed to be shivering—"you could never have—"

"But I did."

She gasped brokenly. "You? You?"

I nodded. "Yes—I."

I tried to tell her, but I suppose I did it badly. Put into a few bald words the tale was not merely sordid, it was low. I could give it no softening touch, no saving grace. It was more beastly than I had ever imagined it.

Fortunately she didn't listen with attention. The means were indifferent to her when she knew the end. For the minute, at any rate, she saw me not as I stood there, clean and in white, but as I had been a year be-

fore, dirty and in rags. But she saw more than that. With every word I uttered she saw the ideal she had formed broken into shivers, like a shattered looking-glass.

She interrupted my preposterous story to gasp, "I can't believe it!"

"But it's true."

"Then you mustn't mind if—if I put you to a test. Did you — did you write anything while you were there?"

"I printed something—in the same kind of letters you've seen at the bottom of architects' plans."

"And how did you come to do it?"

I recounted the circumstance, at which she nodded her head in verification.

"So that was how you knew the words you repeated to me a few months ago?"

"That was how. I said there were men in the world different from any you'd seen yet; and I told you to wait."

She made a tremendous effort to become again the daring mistress of herself which she generally was. She smiled, too, nervously, and with a kind of sickening, ghastly whiteness.

"Funny, isn't it? There are men in the world different from any I'd seen before that time. I've—I've waited—and found out."

Before I could utter a rejoinder to this she said, quite courteously, "Will you excuse me?"

I bowed.

With no further explanation she marched down the length of the veranda—carrying herself proudly, placing her dainty feet daintily, walking with that care which

people show when they are not certain of their ability to walk straight—and entered the house.

I didn't know why she had gone; but I knew the worst was over. Though I felt humiliation to the core of the heart's core, I also felt relief.

With a foot dangling, I sat sidewise on the veranda rail and waited. Glancing at my watch, I saw it was not yet four, and I had lived through years since I had climbed the hill at one. My sensations were comparable only to those of the man who has been on trial for his life and is waiting for the verdict.

I waited nervously, and yet humbly. Now that it was all over, it seemed to me that the bitterness of death was past. Whatever else I should have to go through in life, nothing could equal the past quarter of an hour.

The sensations I hadn't had while making my confession began to come to me by degrees. Looking back over the chasm I had crossed, I was amazed to think I had had the nerve for it. I trembled reminiscently; the cold sweat broke out on my forehead. It was terrible to think that at that very minute she was in there weighing the evidence, against me and in my favor.

Mechanically I relighted the cigar that had gone out. Against me and in my favor! I was not blind to the fact that in my favor there was something. I had gone down, but I had also struggled up again; and you can make an appeal for the man who has done that.

She was long in coming back. I glanced at my watch, and it was nearly half past four. Her weighing of the evidence had taken her half an hour, and it was evidently not over yet. Well, juries were often slow in coming to a verdict; and doubtless she was balancing the extenuat-

ing circumstance that I had struggled up against the main fact that I had gone down.

What she considered her ideal had during the past few weeks been gradually transferring itself from her mind to my own. She wouldn't marry a man she couldn't trust; she wouldn't marry a man who hadn't what she called spirit; she wouldn't marry a milksop. But she had well-defined—and yet indefinable—conceptions as to how far in spirit a man should go, and of the difference between being a milksop and a man of honor. She might find it hard to admit that the pendulum of human impulse that swung far in one direction might swing equally far in the other; and therein would lie my danger.

But I must soon know. It was ten minutes of five. The jury had been out more than three-quarters of an hour.

A new quality was being transmuted into the atmosphere. It was as if the lightest, flimsiest veil had been flung across the sun. In the distant glinting of the sea, which had been silver, there came a tremulous shade of gold. The foxgloves bowed themselves like men at prayer. The robins betook themselves to the branches. From unseen depths of the scrub-oak there was an occasional luscious trill, as the time for the singing of birds wasn't over yet.

Round me there was silence. I might have been sitting at the door of an empty house. I listened intently for the sound of returning footsteps, but none came.

At a quarter past five a chill about the heart began to strike me. I had been waiting more than an hour. Could it be possible that . . . ?

It would be the last degree of insult. Whatever she did, she wouldn't subject me to that. It would be worse

than her glove across the face. It was out of the question. I couldn't bear to think of it. Rather than think of it, I went over the probabilities that she would come back with the smile of forgiveness. It would doubtless be a tearful smile, for tears were surely the cause of her delay. When she had controlled them, when she was able to speak and bid me be of good comfort, I should hear the tap of her high heels coming down the uncarpeted stairway. No red Indian ever listened for the tread of a maid's moccasins on forest moss so intently as I for that staccato click.

But only the birds rewarded me, and the cries of boys who had come to bathe on the beach below. There was more gold in the light; more trilling in the branches; a more pungent scent from the trees, the flowers, and the grass; and that was all.

It was half past five; it was a quarter to six; it was six.

At six o'clock I knew.

My hat was lying on a chair near by. I picked it up—and went.

I went, not by the avenue and the path, but down the queer, rickety flights of steps that led from one jutting rock to another over the face of the cliff, till I reached the beach. It was a broad, whitish, sandy beach, with a quietly lapping tide almost at the full. Full tide was marked a few feet farther up by a long, wavy line of seaweed and other jetsam.

It was the delicious hour for bathing. As far as one could see in either direction there were heads bobbing in the water and people scrambling in and out. Shrill cries of women and children, hoarse shouts of men, mingled with the piping of birds overhead. Farther out than the bathers there were rowboats, and beyond the

rowboats sails. In the middle of the Sound a steamer or two trailed a lazy flag of smoke. Far, far to the south and the west a haze like that round a volcano hung over New York. I should return there next day to face new conditions. I only wished to God that it could be that night.

The new conditions were, briefly, three: I could use the revolver still lying in my desk; or I could begin to drink again; or, like the bull wounded in the ring, I could seek shelter in the dumb sympathy of the Down and Out.

The last seemed to me the least attractive. I had climbed that hill, and found it led only to a precipice that I had fallen over.

Neither did the first possibility charm me especially. Apart from the horror of it, it was too brief, too sudden, too conclusive. I wanted the gradual, the prolonged.

It was the second course to which my mind turned with the nearest approach to satisfaction. Christian had told me that some of my severest tussles lay ahead; and now I had come to the one in which I should go under. In that the flesh at least would get its hour of compensation, when all was said and done.

At the foot of Mrs. Grace's steps I paused to recall Christian's words of a few days previously:

"In love and truth together there's a power which, if we have the patience to wait for its working out, will solve all difficulties and meet all needs."

I had tried that—love and truth together!—and at the result I could only laugh.

My immediate fear was lest Mrs. Grace and the Grahams would be on the veranda, vaguely expecting to offer me their congratulations. When half-way up the steps I heard voices and knew that they were there. So be it!

I had faced worse things in my life; and now I could face that.

But as I advanced up the lawn I saw them moving about and talking with animation. As soon as Mrs. Grace caught sight of me she hurried down the steps, meeting me as I passed among the flower-beds. She held a newspaper marked Extra in her hand, and seemed to have forgotten that I had love-affairs.

"Have you seen this? Colt, the chauffeur, was at the station and brought it back. It's just come down from New York."

Glad of anything that would distract attention from myself, I took the paper in my hand and pretended to be reading it. All I got was the vague information that some one had been assassinated—some man and his morganatic wife. What did it matter to me? What did it matter to any one? Of all that was printed there, only five syllables took possession of my memory—and that because they were meaningless, "Gavrilo Prinzip!"

I was repeating them to myself as I handed the paper back, and we exchanged comments of which I have no recollection. More comments were passed with the Grahams, and then, blindly, drunkenly, I made my way to my room.

There I found nothing to do less classic than to sit at the open window, to look over at the red-and-yellow house on the opposite hill. It was my intention to think the matter out, but my brain seemed to have stopped working. Nothing came to me but those barbaric sounds, that kept repeating themselves with a kind of hiss: "Gavrilo Prinzip! Gavrilo Prinzip!"

From my stupefied scanning of the paper I hadn't grasped the fact that a name utterly unknown that more-

ing was being flashed round the world at a speed more rapid than that of the earth round the sun. Still less did I suspect that it was to become in its way the most sinister name in history. I kept repeating it only as you repeat senseless things in the minutes before you go to sleep.

"Gavrilo Prinzip! Gavrilo Prinzip! Gavrilo Prinzip!"

CHAPTER XVII

I CAME back as Major Melbury, of one of the Canadian regiments.

It was in November, 1916, that I was invalided home to Canada, lamed and wearing a disfiguring black patch over what had been my left eye.

There were other differences of which I can hardly tell you in so many words, but which must transpire as I go on. Briefly, they summed themselves up in the fact that I had gone away one man and I was coming back another. My old self had not only been melted down in the crucible, but it had been stamped with a new image and superscription. It was of a new value and a new currency, and, I think I may venture to add, of that new coinage minted in the civil strife of mankind.

The day of my sailing from Liverpool was exactly two years four months and three weeks from that on which I had last seen Regina Barry; and because it was so I must tell you at once of an incident that occurred at the minute when I stepped on board.

Having come up the long gangway easily enough, I found that at the top, where passengers and their friends congregate, my difficulties began.

When my left eye had been shot out the right had suffered in sympathy, and also from shock to the retina. For a while I had been blind. Rest and care in the hospital my sister, Mabel Rideover, maintained at Taplow

had, however, restored the sight of my right eye; and now my trouble was only with perspective. People and things crowded on one another as they do in the vision of a baby. I would dodge that which was far away, and allow myself to bump into objects quite near me.

As I stepped on deck I had a minute or two of bewilderment. There were so many men more helpless than I that whatever care there was to give was naturally bestowed on them. Moreover, most of those who thronged the top of the gangway had too many anxieties of their own to notice that a man who at worst was only half blind didn't know which way to turn.

But I did turn—at a venture. The venture took me straight into a woman holding a baby in her arms, whom I crushed against the nearest cabin wall. The woman protested; the baby screamed. I was about, in the rebound, to crash into some other victim when I felt from behind me a hand take me by the arm. An almost invisible guide began to pilot me through the crowd. All I caught sight of was a Canadian nurse's uniform.

It is one of the results of the war that men, who are often reduced to the mere shreds of human nature, grow accustomed to being taken care of by women, who remain the able-bodied ones.

"Thanks," I laughed, as the light touch pushed me along, slightly in advance. "You caught me right in the nick of time. I can see pretty well with my good eye, only I can't measure distances. They tell me that will come by degrees."

Even though occupied with other thoughts, I was surprised that my rescuer didn't respond to my civility, for another result of the war is the ease with which the men and women who have been engaged in it get on terms of

natural acquaintanceship. When artificial barriers are removed, it is extraordinary how quickly we go back to primitive human simplicity. Social and sex considerations have thus been minimized to a degree which, it seems to me, will make it difficult ever to re-establish them in their old first place. They say it was an advance in civilization when we ceased to see each other as primarily males and females and knew we were men and women. Possibly the war will lead us a step farther still and reveal us as children of one family.

That a nurse shouldn't have a friendly word for a partly incapacitated man struck me, therefore, as odd, though my mind would not have dwelt on the circumstance if she hadn't released my arm as abruptly as she had taken it. Having helped me to reach a comparatively empty quarter of the deck, she had counted, apparently, on the slowness and awkwardness of my movements to slip away before I could turn round.

When I managed this feat she was already some yards down the length of the deck, hurrying back toward the crowd from which we had emerged. I saw then that she was too little to be tall and too tall to be considered little. Moreover, she carried herself proudly, placing her dainty feet daintily, and walking with that care which people display when they are not certain of their ability to walk straight. Reaching one of the entrances, she went in, exactly as I had seen a woman pass through a doorway two years four months and three weeks before.

I was sure it was she—and yet I told myself it couldn't be. I told myself it couldn't be, for the reason that I had been deceived so frequently before that I had grown distrustful of my senses. All through the intervening time I had been getting glimpses of a slight figure here,

of an alert movement there, of the poise of a head, of the wave of a hand—that for an instant would make my heart stop beating; but in the end it had meant nothing but the stirring of old memories. In this case I could have been convinced if the coincidence had not put too great a strain on all the probabilities.

I was to learn later that there was no coincidence; but I must tell my story in its right order.

The right order takes me back to my return to New York, after my week-end at Mrs. Grace's, on the morning of June 29, 1914.

During the two or three hours of jogging down the length of Long Island in the train I tried to keep out of my mind all thoughts but one; having deposited my bags at my rooms, I should go to Stinson's.

With regard to this intention I was clearly aware of a threefold blend of reaction.

First, there was the pity of it. I could take a detached view of this downfall, just as if I had heard of it in connection with Beady Lamont or old Colonel Straight. Though I should be only a man dropped in the ranks, while they would have been leaders, the grief of my comrades over my collapse would be no less sincere.

But by tearing my mind away from that aspect of the case I reverted to the satisfaction at being in the gutter, of which the memories had never ceased to haunt me. I cannot expect to make you, who have always lived on the upper levels, understand this temptation; I can only tell you that for men who have once been outside the moral law there is a recurrent tugging at the senses to get there again. I once knew an Englishman who had lived in the interior of Australia and had "gone black." On his return to make his home in England he was seized

with so consuming a nostalgia for his black wives and black children that in the end he went back to them. Something like this was the call I was always hearing—the call of Circe to go down.

But I knew, too, that there was method in this madness. I was deliberately starting out to earn the wages of sin; and the wages of sin would be death. I must repeat that going to Stinson's would be no more than a slow, convenient process of committing suicide. It would be committing suicide in a way for which Regina Barry would not have to feel herself responsible, as she would were I to use the revolver. Having brought so much on her, I was unwilling to bring more, even though my heart was hot against her.

My heart was hot against her—and yet I had to admit that she had been within her rights. When all was said that could be said in my favor, I had deceived her. I had let her go on for the best part of a year believing me to be what I was not, when during much of the time I could see that such a belief was growing perilous to her happiness. I had been a coward. I should have said from the first moment—the moment when she took me for my brother Jack—"I am a crook." Then all would have been open and aboveboard between us; but as it was there was only one way out. Any other way—any way that would have allowed me to go on living longer than the time it would take drink to kill me—would have been unbearable.

The checkmate to these musings came when my eyes fell upon Lovey. He was at the door of the apartment, not only to welcome me, but to give me ocular demonstration that he had kept the faith while I had been away. It was the first time since the beginning of our associa-

tion that I had left him for forty-eight hours; and that he was on his honor during those two days was no secret between us. The radiant triumph of his greeting struck into me like a stab.

For Lovey now was almost as completely reconstructed as I. I use the qualifying "almost" only because the longer standing of his habits and the harder conditions of his life had burnt the past more indelibly into him. Of either of us one could say, as the Florentines are reported to have said of Dante, "There goes a man who has been in hell"; but the marks of the experience had been laid more brutally on my companion than on me.

Otherwise he showed cheering signs of resuscitation. Neat, even at the worst of times, he was now habitually scrubbed and shaved, and as elegant as Colonel Straight's establishment could turn him out. He had, in fact, for the hours he had free from washing windows, metamorphosed himself into the typical, self-respecting English valet, with a pride in his work sprung chiefly of devotion.

And for me he made a home. I mean by that that he was always there—something living to greet me, to move about in the dingy little apartment. As I am too gregarious, I may say too affectionate, to live contentedly alone, it meant much to me to have some one else within the walls I called mine, even if actual companionship was limited.

But whatever it was, I was about to destroy it. I could scarcely look him in the eyes; I could hardly say a word to him.

While unpacking my suit-case he said, timorously, "Y'ain't sick, Slim?"

I began to change the suit I had been wearing for one that would attract less attention at Stinson's.

"No, Lovey; I'm all right. I'm just—I'm just going out."

And I went out. I went out without bidding the poor old fellow good-by, though I knew it was the last the anxious pale-blue eyes would see of me in that phase of comradeship. When next we met I should probably be drunk, and he would have come to get drunk in my company. It would then be a question as to which of us would hold out the longer.

And that was the thought that after an hour or two turned me back. I could throw my own life away, but I couldn't throw away his. However reckless I might be on my own account, I couldn't be so when I held another man's fate in my hand.

Even so, I didn't go back at once. Half-way to Stinson's—I was on foot—I came to a sudden halt. It was as if the sense of responsibility toward Lovey wouldn't allow me to go any farther. I said to myself that I must think the matter out—that I must find and would find additional justification for my course before going on.

To do that I turned into a chance hotel.

I like the wide hospitality of American hotels, where any tired or lonesome wayfarer can enter and sit down. I have never been a clubman. Clubs are too elective and selective for my affinities; they are too threshed and winnowed and refined. I have never in spirit had any desire to belong to a chosen few, since not only in heart, but in tastes and temperament, I belong to the unchosen many. I enjoy, therefore, the freedom and promiscuity of the lobby, where every Tom, Dick, and Harry has the same right as I.

Annoyed by the fact that a halt had been called in my

errand of self-destruction, I began to ask myself why. The only answer that came to me was that this old man, this old reprobate, if one chose to call him so, cared for me. He had been giving me an affection that prompted him to the most vital sacrifice, to the most difficult kind of self-control.

Then suddenly that truth came back to me which Andrew Christian had pointed out a few months earlier, and which in the mean time had grown dim, that any true love is of God.

I was startled. I was awed. In saying these things I am trying only to tell you what happened in my inner self; and possibly when a man's inner self has plumbed the depths like mine it means more to him to get a bit of insight than it does to you who have always been on the level. In any case this question rose within me: Was it possible that out of this old man, this drunkard, this murderer, cast off by his children, cast out by men, some feeble stream was welling up toward me from that pure and holy fountain that is God? Was it possible that this strayed creature had, through what he was giving me—me!—been finding his way back to the universal heart? If ever a human being had been dwelling in love he had been dwelling in it for a year and more; and there were the words, distilled out of the consciousness of the ages, and written for all time, "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God." Was it God that this poor, purblind old fellow had all unconsciously been bringing me, shedding round us, keeping us straight, making us strong, making us prosperous, helping us to fight our way upward?

I went back.

But on the way I had another prompting—one that

took me into the office of a tourist company to consult time-tables and buy tickets.

"Lovey," I said, when I got home, "we must both begin packing for all we're worth. We're leaving for Montreal to-night."

"Goin' to see your people, Slim, and stay in that swell hotel?"

"Not just now, Lovey. Later, perhaps. First of all we're going for a month into the woods north of the Ottawa."

His jaw dropped. "Into the woods?"

"Yes, old sport. You'll like it."

"Oh no, I won't, Slim. I never was in no woods in my life—except London and New York. There's one thing I never could abide, and that's trees."

"You won't say that when you've seen real trees. We'll shoot and fish and camp out—"

"Camp out? In a tent, like? Oh, I couldn't, sonny! I'd ketch me death!"

"Then if you do we'll come back; only, we've got to go now."

"Why have we? It's awful nice here in New York; and I don't pay no attention to people that says it's too hot."

I made the appeal which I knew he would not resist. Laying my hand on his shoulder, I said: "Because, old man, I'm—I'm in trouble. I want to get away where—where I sha'n't see—some one—again—and I need you."

"It ain't that girl, Slim? She—she haven't turned you down?"

The words took me so much by surprise that I hadn't time to get angry. All I could feel was a foolish, nervous kind of coolness.

"Lovey, what I want you to know I'll tell you; and at present I'm telling you this: I've got to get out; I've got to get out quick; and I need you to buck me up. No one can buck me up like you."

"Oh, if it's that!" He would have followed me then to places more dreadful than the Canadian woods. "Will you take all your suits—or only just them new summer things?"

CHAPTER XVIII

THUS it happened that when war broke out I was deep in the wilderness. For more than a month I had had no contact with the outside world, not a letter, not a newspaper. I had escaped from New York without leaving an address, since Cantyre was absent. I had meant to write to him to have my letters forwarded, but I never had. Could I have guessed that war was to begin and to last so long I might have acted differently; but the name of Gavrilo Prinzip was still meaningless.

All sportsmen in my part of Canada know Jack Hiller's, just as frequenters of the Adirondacks know Paul Smith's. From Jack Hiller's we struck farther in, to the rude camp where I had spent many a happy holiday when I was a lad. Two guides, an Indian and a half-breed, did the heavy work; and some long-forgotten, atavistic sporting strain in Lovey allowed him, groaningly and discontentedly, to enjoy himself.

But if I expected to find peace I saw I was mistaken. The distance I had put between myself and the house dominating Long Island Sound was only geographical. In spirit I was always back on that veranda, living through again the minutes of the long waiting. So the solitude was no solitude for me. And then one day the half-breed's canoe shot over the waters of the lake, bringing supplies from Jack Hiller's, with the news that the world had gone to war.

I wonder how many hundreds of thousands of men and women there are to whom the war came as a blessed opportunity to get away from uselessness or heartache. Stranded, purposeless, spiritless, futile, tired, empty, with something broken in the life or seemingly at an end, they suddenly found themselves called on to put forth energies they never knew they had, to meet needs they had never heard of.

"Son of man, can these dry bones live?" one might have been asking oneself a few years previously; and all at once there were multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision, energized into newness of being. Among them I was only one humble, stupid individual; but the summons was like that which came to the dust when it was bidden to be Adam and a man.

I have no intention of telling you in detail what happened to me between that August morning in 1914 and the day I stepped on board the boat at Liverpool more than two years later. There is no need. You know the outlines of that tale already. My case hardly differed externally from any other of the millions of cases you have heard about. The machine of war does not vary in its working much more than any other machine, except for the drama played in each man's soul.

And of that I can say nothing. I don't know why—but I cannot. Day and night I think of what I saw and heard and did in those two years, but some other language must be coined before I can begin to speak of it.

In this I am not singular; it is a rule to which I know few, if any, exceptions. I have heard returned soldiers on the lecture platform, telling part of the truth, and nothing but the truth, but never the whole truth nor the most vital truth. I have talked with some of them

when the lectures were over, and a flare in the eye has said, "This is for public consumption; but you and I know that the realities are not to be put into words."

One little incident I must give you, however, before I revert to what happened on the boat.

Having in that early August made my way to Ottawa with Lovey, and decided that I must respond at once to the country's call, I expected a struggle with him, or something bitter in the way of protest. But in this I was mistaken. He, too, had been thinking the matter over, and, hard as it would be for him to see me do it, that quiet valor which practically no Englishman is without raised him at once to the level of his part.

"All right, Slim. It's yer dooty to go, and mine to give ye up. We won't say no more about that."

"Thanks, Lovey, for making it so easy for me. I'll never forget it as long as I live. Now there's only one thing—"

"If it's about me goin' straight, sonny, while ye're away, I'll swear to God not to look so much as on the same side o' the street as a drop o' liquor till He brings ye back to me."

"Then I believe He will bring me back, old fellow."

"Sure He'll bring ye back. Ye'll be 'ome before Christmas; and, Slim, if it isn't goin' to cost ye too much money, won't ye 'old on to them rooms so as I can keep our little place together, like, and 'ave it all clean and nice for you—?"

Having consented to this, I was able to make further provision for the old man when Cantyre joined me for a day or two in Montreal to bid me good-by. Lovey's heroism was the sort of thing to draw out Cantyre's sentimental vein of approval.

"I'll take him and look after him, Frank. He'll valet me till you come back. I've always wanted a man to do that sort of thing, and only haven't had one because I thought it would look like putting on side. But now that he drops down to me out of heaven, as you might say, I'll take him as a souvenir of you."

CHAPTER XIX

ALL these interests had seemed far away from me during the two and a half years over there; but in proportion as I drew near Liverpool that morning they reformed themselves in the mists of the near future, as old memories come back with certain scents and scenes. Not till the damp, smoky haze of the great port was closing in round me did I realize that my more active part in the vast cosmic episode was at an end, and that I had come to the hour I had so often longed for—and was going home.

I was going home; and yet, for the minute, at any rate, I was not glad. There is always something painful in the taking up again of forsaken ties, however much we once loved them. It was like a repetition of the effort with which I had renewed my relations with my people. The actual has a way of seizing us in its tentacles and making us feel that it is the only life we ever truly led. There was a time when I seemed to forget that I had ever been anywhere but in the trenches. During the month or two that I was blind I got so used to the condition as to find it strange that I had ever seen. And always, in face of the fierce intensity of the present, the life in New York was remote, shadowy, and dim, as they say the life in prison becomes from its very monotony to those who look back on it after their release.

What it really amounted to was that during those two

years I seemed to have grown in the size of my mental conceptions. Having been hurled into an existence gigantic, monstrous, in which there were no limits to either the devotion or the cruelty of human beings toward one another, all other ways of living had grown pale and small. If you can imagine yourself swirling through space, riding both zephyrs and tempests equally as a matter of course, you can understand how tame it would seem to be tied down to earth again, to go at nothing more stimulating than a walking pace. Otherwise typified, a lion that has been in a cage, and after two and a half years of free roving in the jungle finds itself returned to the cage again, would probably have the same sinking of the heart as I when I saw the hulk of the *Assiniboia* loom up before me in the dock.

And then came that odd little incident of the nurse to connect me with the past by a new form of excitement. I have to confess that it was excitement largely compounded of wonder and distress. A dull ache told me that sensation was returning to a deadened nerve, and that where I had supposed there was paralysis at least there was going to be reaction and perhaps a pang.

For by this time I had passed through that process which is commonly known as "getting over it." That is, a new self was living a new life on a new plane of existence. All that belonged to the period before I went to enlist at Ottawa was on the other side of a flood. I had not precisely forgotten; I had only died and become a transmigrated soul. Whatever was past was past. I might suffer from it; I might feel its consequences; but I couldn't live it again. On the other hand, I was living vividly in the present. Not so much consciously or by word as because I couldn't help it, I had merged every-

thing I was into one dominating purpose with which, as far as I was aware, Regina Barry had nothing to do. The aims for which the war was being fought were my aims; I had no others. When these objectives were won my life, it seemed to me, would be over. It would melt away in that victory as dawn into sunrise. It would not be lost; it would only be absorbed—a spark in the blaze of noonday.

So mentally I was pressing forward. Though I could do no more fighting, I had been told that there was still work by which I could contribute to the object beside which no other object could be taken into consideration. I was being sent back for that reason. Not much had been told me as yet about what I was to do, but I understood that it was to be in connection with American public opinion. It will be remembered that at the end of 1916 the United States was not only not in the war, but it was still doubtful as to whether or not she ever would be. The hand of a cautious listener being on the pulse of a patient people, it was on the beat of that pulse that the issue turned.

I understood that, with my acquaintance ranging among high and low, I was to do what I could to make the pulse a little quicker. I might not be able to do much, but we had all learned the value of small individual contributions. It was argued that in proportion as the American people began to see on which side the balance of righteousness dipped, my game leg and my black patch, and the haggardness and gauntness and batteredness of my whole appearance, would have some appeal. The appeal would be the stronger for the fact that I was not an Englishman, but a Canadian—blood-brother to the man of his own continent, blood-brother to the Briton,

blood-brother to the Frenchman, blood-son of the great ideals fathered by the Anglo-Saxon race, and in which all free peoples in the course of two hundred years had been made participants—and quick to spring to their defense. I was to be, therefore, a kind of unobtrusive, unaccredited ambassador to the man in the office and the street, with instructions to be inoffensive but persuasive.

And on this mission all my conscious thought was set. No hermit in the desert was ever more entirely self-dedicated to the saving of his soul than I to the quiet preaching of this new crusade among men like Ralph Coningsby and Stephen Cantyre and Beady Lamont and Headlights and Daisy and Momma and Mouse, and any others with whom I should come in contact. In fulfilling this task I wanted no one to disturb or distract me; and here at the very outset was some one who might do both.

CHAPTER XX

AFTER having found my cabin and seen to my belongings I hobbled up on deck once more, to verify my vision of the Canadian nurse's uniform. I discovered the uniform in two or three instances, but in none that corresponded to the figure too little to be tall and too tall to be considered little I had watched receding down the deck.

As for the costume itself, it was not difficult to find myself beside one of the ladies who wore it—a beautiful, grave woman, of the type of Bouguereau's Consolatrice, who, with hands resting on the deck rail, was looking down at the movement on the dock.

"There seem to be a number of nurses going back," I observed, after an introductory word or two.

"There are three in our party—myself and the two over there."

The two over there were two I had already seen, neither of them being my pilot of a half-hour previously.

"I thought I saw another," I threw off, casually.

"I believe there is one—an American girl from Lady Rideover's hospital at Taplow."

As I had just come from Lady Rideover's hospital at Taplow, and Lady Rideover herself was my sister, I suggested, without mentioning the relationship, that in this speculation there was some mistake.

"She may not have come directly from there," the

Consolatrice admitted; "but I know she was with Lady Rideover six months ago."

"But six months ago I was with Lady Rideover myself."

"Well, she was there then."

"But I should have seen her if she had been."

She turned slowly round on me, with deep, kind eyes. "Would you? You could see all the time?"

I had forgotten that. There had been two months when I hadn't seen at all. Any one might have come and gone during that time.

Remarking on the inconvenience of having no list of passengers, I asked my companion if she knew the young lady's name.

"No; but I can inquire of my friends. They may know."

Having crossed to speak to the nurses on the other side of the deck, she came back without the information.

"But Miss Prynne," she added, "that's the short one, says that the young lady came over about two years ago with Lady Rideover's sister, Miss Melbury, of Montreal."

I withdrew to ponder. I had been in continuous if desultory communication with my sisters during all my time abroad, and no mention of Regina Barry had ever escaped either. I had not supposed that they knew one another. I couldn't bring myself to believe that I had been under the same roof with her at Taplow and had not been aware of it. And here she was on board the ship on which I was returning home, and able to come to my aid at a minute when I wanted help.

I had often wished that some of my New York correspondents would speak of her, but no one ever had. Except in the case of Cantyre this was hardly strange, for—

apart from Hilda Grace, who never wrote to me—no one knew that Regina Barry and I had meant anything to each other. If Cantyre had spoken of her, it would have been on his own account; but confidential as he was in private talk, his letters were never more than a few terse lines. So I had rather bitterly imagined her as going on with the testing of other men, as she had tested Jim Hunter, Cantyre, and me—trying them and finding them wanting. In ungenerous moments I went so far as to hope that Nemesis might overtake her in some tremendous passion in which she herself would be tried and tossed aside.

It was, however, the second day out before I actually came face to face with her. Her absence from the deck had been part of the mystery. Having swung into the Mersey, we remained there all Sunday night—it was a Sunday we had gone on board—and much of Monday. Accepting as necessary the secrecy which in war-time enshrouds an Atlantic voyage, the passengers had made themselves as comfortable as the conditions permitted, and taken air and exercise by promenading the decks. There could have been no better opportunity for finding familiar faces, but, apart from one or two distant acquaintances, I saw none. The three nurses' uniforms I had noted already were continually about; but I never found the fourth.

And then on Tuesday, after we had lost sight of the Irish coast, there was another queer little incident. As I could walk but little, I had been reading in the music-room. Tired of doing that and eager to continue my search for the missing uniform, I had limped to the doorway, screened by a heavy portière, leading out toward the companionway. But while I stood turning up the

collar of my overcoat the portière was suddenly pulled aside, and we were before each other, with a suggestion of a similar occurrence three and a half years before.

The very differences in my appearance—the mustache, the patch over my left eye, the military coat—must have helped to recall the earlier occasion by the indirect means of contrast. As for her, she was what she had seemed to me then—two great flaming eyes. They were tired eyes now, haunted, tragic perhaps, and I saw later that when you caught them off their guard they were pensive, if not mournful. They were, indeed, all I could see of her, for the rest of her features were hidden by the veil over the lower part of the face which women occasionally copy from the Turkish lady's yashmak. A small black cap, held by a jade-green pin, and a long, shapeless black ulster or coat completed a costume quite unlike the uniform for which I had been looking.

I can only describe that encounter as the meeting of two transmigrated souls. She had gone as far in her direction as I in mine; but I couldn't tell at a glance in what direction she had gone. It was what struck me dumb. When Paolo and Francesca met in space they had nothing to say to each other except with the eyes. In some such case as that we found ourselves. The pressure of topics was too great to allow of immediate selection. She seemed to wait for me to utter the first word, and as I was at a loss she dropped the portière behind her, inclined her head, and passed on into the saloon.

Though it was my place to follow her, I couldn't, for the minute, take so obvious a course. I was not only too mystified by what I had heard of her, but too confused as to our standing toward each other. I couldn't

begin with a "How do you do?" as if we had parted on the ordinary social terms, while anything more dramatic would have been absurd. Hobbling along the deck, I took refuge in the smoking-room in order to reflect.

Reflection was not easy. Over its calm fields emotion spread like water through a broken dike. For two and a half years the emotional had been so stemmed and banked and dammed in me that I had thought it under control forever. I had had enough to do in giving orders or carrying them out. But, now that the repressed had broken its bounds again, the tide swept everything away with it.

Not that I knew just what I was experiencing; on the contrary, I couldn't have disentangled the element of anger from that of curiosity, nor that of curiosity from that of joy. All I could say for certain was that never in my life had I been so anxious to keep free; never had I so much needed concentration and single-mindedness. The task to which I had vowed my undivided energy and heart demanded a genuine celibacy of the will; and now of all the women in the world . . .

I was working on this train of thought when I became aware that people were running along the deck. Glancing about me at the same moment, I saw I was alone in the smoking-room. A whistle blew, piercingly, alarmingly. By the time I had struggled to my feet the ship changed her course so sharply as to throw me against a chair.

I knew what it was, of course. We had been talking of the possibility ever since we left the Mersey. However much we tried to keep the mind away from the subject, it came back to it, as a mischievous boy makes straight for the thing forbidden him.

My first thought was for the girl in the yashmak. I must find her, see she had a life-belt, and take her to her boat. Before I had scrambled to the door, however, it flew open, apparently of its own accord, while a wild nor'wester positively blew the young lady in.

It also blew away anything like Paolo-and-Francesca sentiment.

"Oh, here you are!" she exclaimed, breathlessly. "I've been hunting for you everywhere. They say we've sighted a periscope. Take this and put it on."

Of the two life-belts she carried she flung one to me, beginning to fasten the other about herself.

"But the one you've brought me must belong to some one else," I objected, as I aided her. "I've got one of my own in my cabin. I'll just run down—"

She brushed this aside. "No; this is yours. I went and got it."

"You—" I began in astonishment.

"I'm a nurse—or a kind of one," she said, hastily. "That's what I'm here for."

"But you knew where my cabin was?"

"I found out. Oh, hurry—please!"

She helped me as a medieval lady might have helped her lord to buckle on his sword; and presently we were out on deck.

As we had twice already drilled in the unsightly things, we had lost the sense of the grotesque appearance presented by ourselves and our fellow-travelers. Besides, we were too eager to descry the periscope to have any more thought of ourselves than a wild duck of how it looks when skimming away from a sniper. Indeed, it was chiefly of a hunted wild duck that our zigzagging boat reminded me.

It was a sullen day, with that scudding of low, gray clouds which looks as if the heavens were hastening to some Armageddon of their own. The sea had hardly got over the swell left by one gale when it was being lashed into fury by another. The *Assiniboia* pitched and rolled and tore through the waters like a monster goaded by innumerable stings. I should have found it next to impossible to struggle along the deck had my protectress not stood by and steadied me.

There was a kind of foolish pretense at the chivalrous in my tone as I said, "I'll just see you to your boat before going over to mine."

"We're in the same boat," she answered, briefly. "Do come along."

I thought of my forty-eight hours of unfruitful search for her.

"But I didn't see you at Number Seven when we drilled yesterday."

"I'm there now," she said, with the same brevity. Feeling, apparently, that some explanation was needed, she went on: "I've— I mean they—they've changed me. Miss Prynne has let me have—or rather she's taken— That is," she finished, in confusion, "we're all nurses together—and we've—we've exchanged."

In spite of some inward observations, I spared her any other comment than to say, "How jolly!" as if the exchange had been the most matter-of-course thing in the world.

I spoke just now of riding tempests and zephyrs, and something like that it was to plow along at every ounce of steam, with cross seas, head seas, seas abeam, and seas abaft, as each new zigzag caught them. On the roaring of the wind and the plunge and thunder of the

waves one rose into regions of tumultuous play where life and death were the stakes. I saw no signs of fear, and still less of panic; nor, so far as the eye could read, anything more than a sporting excitement. One would have said that our peril was accepted as being all in the game, part of the day's work. By the end of 1916 Atlantic travelers had come to take the submarine for granted, just as the statesmen of Plantagenet and Tudor times took the headsman's block as one of the natural risks of going into politics.

But we looked instinctively for a periscope. It is not an easy thing for any one to see, and for me it was more difficult than for most. I saw none; or I saw a hundred. With the imperfect vision of my one eye the crests of the billows bristled with moving four-inch pipes; and then suddenly all would disappear and I saw nothing but the waves curling upward into coronets of foam with veils of trailing lace.

Not that I was worse off in this respect than my fellow-travelers. As they ran for their boats they would pause, take a hurried look at the seas, exclaiming, "There it is!" and then, more doubtfully, "No, no!" all in one breath. The "No, no!" was generally uttered in a tone of disappointment, since to cross the ocean and sight no submarine would have been like journeying through Egypt and missing the pyramids.

And yet our danger was apparent. Only a fortnight before the *Kamouraska*, sister ship to the *Assiniboia*, had been sent to the bottom in these very waters, with great loss of life. Of the tragedy the papers had given us realistic pictures that were fresh in all our minds. There was a preliminary scene on board not unlike the one we were enacting. We saw later a shell bursting on the

deck, somewhere amidships. We saw the passengers and crew taking to the boats with shells kicking up geysers among them as they tried to get away. We saw the great ship sticking as straight up out of the water as a Cleopatra's Needle, before going slowly down. We saw the U-boat herself lying on the water like a crocodile, some four thousand yards away; we saw Queenstown as a morgue. All this was as vividly in our minds as a rehearsal to the actors of a play; and yet we were probably no more nervous than the company on a first night when the curtain is going up.

The word went round that it was the fate of the *Kamouraska*, with the futility of her surrender as a means of saving the passengers' lives, that prompted our captain to flight and fight. Our wireless calls were undoubtedly going up and down the Irish coast and out into the ocean. Within an hour or two, if we could hold out so long, destroyers would be rushing to our rescue. We had nothing to be terribly afraid of with more than an imaginative fear.

That imaginative fear was quickened by the seemingly maddened action of our ship. I can best describe her as a leviathan gone insane. If insanity were to overtake a whale it would probably splash the deep in some such frenzy as this—so many angles out of the course one way—then a violent heeling over—so many angles out of the course another way—anyway, anywhere, anything—to get out of that straight, staid line from port to port which makes an ocean-going ship a liner. I admit that in this wild, erratic dashing there was something that alarmed us, and something, too, that made us laugh. It was the comic side of madness, in which you can hardly see the terrible because of the grotesque.

By the time we reached life-boat No. 7 there were many signs that neither officers nor passengers were going to take more chances than they were obliged to. At No. 5 on one side of us a young officer was on top, peeling off the tarpaulin covering. At No. 9 on the other side some of the crew were already mounted, examining supplies and oars. At our own boat, cranks were being fitted to the davits to swing the boat outward. All along the line similar preparations were in progress, while men and women—luckily we had no children on board—carrying such wraps and hand-bags as they might reasonably take, stood in groups, waiting for what was to happen next.

Our view of the sea was largely cut off here by the bulk of the life-boats, though wherever there was a chink there was also a cluster of heads. So many saw periscopes—and so many didn't see them—that it became a mild joke. In general we surmised that if a U-boat was cruising round us at all she had only been porpoising—sticking up her periscope for a second or two to get a look round, and withdrawing it before it could be seen by any eye not on that very spot.

The girl in the yashmak and I arrived so late on the scene that there were no places left by the rail, and we were obliged to content ourselves with second-hand information as to what was taking place. Our excitement had, therefore, a lack of point, like that of the small boy behind the line of grown-up people watching a procession. We fell back in the end into a kind of alcove, where, being partially protected from wind and tumult, we could speak to each other without shouting.

I took the opportunity to thank her for her kindness to ne when I came on board on Sunday; but with my opening

words the air of Francesca meeting Paolo in space came over her again. I understood her to say that her help on Sunday was a little thing, that she would have given it to any one.

"Of course," I agreed. "you would have given it to any one; but in this case you gave it to me. You must allow me to thank you before anything happens that might—that might make gratitude too late."

As I think of her now I can see that she was mistress of herself in the way that a letter-perfect actress is mistress of herself, repeating words that have been learned to fit a certain situation. She had foreseen that I would say something of the kind; she had foreseen that when I did she might be a prey to troublesome emotions; and so had fortified herself in advance by a studied set of phrases.

"I'm so little of a nurse that I should be ashamed not to do for a soldier the few small things in my power."

If she had never made me suffer anything, and if the moment had not been one that might conceivably end our relations forever, I should probably not have uttered the words that came to me next.

"Was it only because I'm a soldier—?"

She interrupted skilfully. "Only because you're a soldier? Isn't a soldier the most splendid man in the world —especially at a time like this?"

Bang!

It was one of our two guns. As a merchantman, not built to withstand the concussion of cannon, the *Assiniboia* shuddered.

With an involuntary start my companion caught me by the sleeve. The impulse to seize her hand and draw it gently within my arm was irresistible. Had I reflected,

I might not have done this, since my dominant desire was to keep stripped and unencumbered for the race.

She allowed me to retain her hand just long enough to show that she was not mortally offended, after which she gently disengaged herself. To cover the constraint that both of us felt I went on to wonder if our shot had taken effect. A young man who had gone to find out came back with the news that the lookout, having spied the pin furrow of the periscope, the shot had been fired at a venture. As far as could be observed it had done nothing but send up a waterspout.

On receiving this information I went on with our interrupted personalities.

"Ever since Sunday I've wondered what had become of you; but then I've been looking for the uniform."

"I always intended taking that off when I got on board. You see, I never was a nurse in any but an amateur sense, and so—"

It was my opportunity to spring the surprise I had been holding in reserve ever since my talk with the Consolatrice in the dock at Liverpool.

"When did you last see Mabel?"

She spoke with a sharp, sudden mezzo cry that might have been caused by pain.

"Who told you that?"

"Who told me what?"

Bang!

It was our second gun, and though the girl in the yashmak started again, she did not seize my arm. To hold the drama at its instant of suspense, I pretended to be more interested in the effect of the shot than in anything else in the world, as in other circumstances I should have been. I turned to this one and that one, inviting their

guesses, noting all the while that over Regina Barry's eyes there spread the surface fire that a flaming sunset casts on troubled water.

She harked back to the subject as soon as it was clear that we had missed our aim again.

"Lady Rideover promised me she'd never tell you."

Her tone having become accusatory, I broke in on it with studied nonchalance.

"And she never did. To the best of my recollection she never mentioned your name to me. But is there anything wrong in my knowing that you and she are friends?"

Color mounted to her brows where the yashmak couldn't conceal it, though she ignored the question.

"And I'm sure it wasn't your sister Evelyn."

"Why shouldn't it have been?"

"Because she promised me, too. I should be frightfully hurt if I thought she—"

"Then I'll relieve your mind by assuring you that she didn't. But to me the curious thing is that you shouldn't have wanted me to know."

She ignored this, too, a furrow of perplexity deepening between her brows.

"It isn't possible that Lady Rideover or Evelyn, without telling you in words, should have allowed you to suspect—"

"Not any more than they allowed me to suspect that I was being nursed by a houri out of paradise."

She hastened to make a correction. "Oh, I never acted as nurse to you! It was that Miss Farley."

"But you were at Taplow when I was there, and in and out of my room."

The peculiar light in her eyes, partly of amazement, partly of incredulity, reminded me of a poor trapped

lady I had once seen in the prisoner's dock while a witness recounted the secrets of her life with remarkable exactness of detail.

"But you couldn't see me!" she began, helplessly.

"No, but I could hear."

"And you didn't hear me. If I went into your room, which I didn't often do—"

I launched a theory that was purely inspiration.

"Oh, I know. If you came into my room you didn't make a sound. You arranged that with Mabel. But haven't you heard that the blind develop an extra sense?"

"Not as quickly as that—or with that precision." She brightened with a new thought. "If your extra sense told you I was there, why didn't you speak to me?"

"Suppose I said that I respected your incognita? If you didn't want to speak to me it must have been for a reason. I couldn't ignore that."

Whir-r-r! Z-z-z! P-ff!

A shell from the submarine struck the water somewhere near us, though all we saw was a column of white spume on the port side of the ship, while we were on the starboard.

She ignored even this. Standing erect, with her hands in the pockets of her ulster, with no feature to betray her but her eyes, she surmised, calmly, "Some of the other nurses or one of the patients must have given you a hint."

"None of them ever pronounced your name in my hearing."

"Then I give up guessing!" she said, with a touch of impatience.

"Which is what I can't do."

"But what have you to guess at?"

"At what you've done it—at what you're doing it—for."

She may have smiled behind the yashmak as she said, "What difference does it make to you?"

"I dare say it doesn't make any—except that I seem to be the person benefited."

"In time of war the soldier—the man who does the thing—is the person benefited."

"Oh no; there's the cause."

"But surely, if we've learned anything during the past two years, it's that what the soldier does for the cause can't compare with what the cause does for the soldier."

I saw my opportunity and was quick to use it. "So that out of what you've been doing for me even you have got something."

She turned this neatly. "I've got a great deal—out of what I've been doing for every one. Not that it's been much. I merely mean that, whatever it's been, it's brought me in far more than I've ever given out."

The swing of the boat was so abrupt as almost to make her heel over. Up and down the deck such passengers as were clinging to nothing were flung this way and that, with some laughing and a few involuntary cries. Miss Barry having braced me in a corner of the alcove because of my game leg, I kept my footing steadily, but the girl herself was thrown square into my arms.

Not more than a second later another Whir-r-r! Z-z-z! warned us that another shell was on the way; but before we had time to be afraid a soft P-ff! told us that this, too, had struck the water. The waterspout, this time on the starboard side, not only spattered us with spray, but made it clear that only the sharp shifting of the course

had saved us from a hole in our bow. That within the next few minutes our enemy would get us somewhere was a little more than probable.

Then from every cluster of heads came the cry, "Oh, look!"

There she was—a blue-gray streak, only a little darker than the blue-gray waters. The change in our course revealed her as she lay on the surface to shell us, since she was too far away to send us a torpedo. We forgot everything—Regina Barry and I forgot each other—to gaze. My arms relaxed their hold on the girl because there was no longer a mind to direct them; the girl took command of herself because it was only thus that she could observe the most baleful and fascinating monster in the world.

For it was as a monster, baleful and fascinating, that we regarded her. She was not a thing planned by men's brains and built in a shipyard. She was an abnormal, unscrupulous, venomous water beast, with a special enmity toward man. She had about her the horror of the trackless, the deep, the solitary, the lonesome, the devilish. Few of us had ever got a glimpse of her before. It was like Saint George's first sight of the dragon that wasted men and cities, and called forth his hatred and his sword.

I think that sheer hatred was the cause of our banging away at her with our two guns. We could hardly expect to hit her. She must have been out of our range, and our only hope was in getting out of hers.

As far as we could judge she was lying still and shelling us at her ease. Splash! Splash! Splash! The screeching things went all round us; but by some miracle they were only spectacular.

Viewed as a spectacle, there was a terrific beauty in it

all. Nature and man were raging together, ferociously, magnificently, without conscience, without quarter, without remorse. Hell had unsealed its springs even in us who stood watchful and inactive. There was a sense of abhorrent glory in the knowledge that there were no limits to which we would not go. That there were no limits to which our enemy would not go with us was stimulating, quickening, like the flicker of the whip to the racer. About and above us were all the elements of which man is most accustomed to be afraid, but which, now that we were among them, inspired an appalling glee.

It was amazing how quickly we got used to it, just as, I am told, a man after a night or two gets used to being in the death-house. To be shelled on a stormy, lonely ocean came within a few minutes to being a matter of course. Had we had time to reflect and look backward, it would have seemed strange to think that we had made voyages across the Atlantic in which we had not been shelled.

Then all of a sudden there was a noise like that in a house when it is struck by lightning. It was as if all creation had burst into sound, as if there were nothing anywhere that was not a concomitant of an ear-splitting, soul-splitting crash. It was over us; it was round us; it was everywhere; it might have been within us. In our own persons we seemed to be rent by it.

From the port side a blast of smoke rose and poisoned the dark air. A few shrieks, half suppressed by the shriekers, ran the length of the deck, and a few male exclamations of astonishment and awe. For the most part, however, we stood still and soundless, as I believe we should have held ourselves had it proved to be the Judgment Day.

Our immediate impression was that all the aft of the

ship had been carried away. Had she begun to settle stern foremost on the instant we should not have been surprised. We could hardly believe that the long, narrow perspective of the deck, with its groups dotting the length of it, could remain unshattered and afloat. We were sure the decks below must have been blown into air and water.

For the hundredth part of a second the *Assiniboia* appeared to stop still in her course, like a creature with its death-wound. She seemed stricken, stunned. But she gave another lurch, another swing to her huge person; and when the second shell came on, taking the range of that which had struck her, it plowed the waves astern. All seemed to be over in the space of between two breaths. By the time we could get our wits together sufficiently to ask what had happened she was once more driving onward.

It was splendid. It was sublime. It thrilled one with pride in pluck and seamanship. One could have hugged the brave old leviathan by the neck.

A British seaman, running down the deck on some errand, cried, as he passed us: "Got the old bucket aft, just above the water-line. But, Lor'! she don't mind it! Didn't do no 'arm. On'y killed Sammy Smelt, a steerage cabin-boy."

But it was a beginning. Nothing could save us now but speed and the captain's skill. The young officer who had helped to strip the covering off No. 5 strolled by us, smoking a cigarette.

"We're showing her a pretty clean pair of heels," he said, coolly, by way of dealing out encouragement. "Ship's carpenter's begun plugging up the hole. That won't hurt us so long as we don't get another."

"What about the cabin-boy?" some one called out.

He shrugged his shoulders, saying, merely, "Doctor attending to the wounded."

It was strange to be tearing through the seas, with that erratic course of the crazed leviathan, when at any second death might strike us from the air. I had often been under shell-fire, of course; but on land there was generally some dugout, some *abri*, in which one could seek shelter. What impressed me here was the vast exposure of it all. We could only stand with the heaven over us, ready to take to the boats, if need be, or equally ready to be blown into bits like little Sammy Smelt.

Among the people on the deck the quiet waiting which the traditions of the race have made second nature continued. We might have been passengers gathered at the entrance to a railway track. If a scared look haunted some faces, it was not more than might have been occasioned by the extreme lateness of a train.

The shells were still splashing, the ship was still driving onward under every pound of steam, when I looked again at the girl in the yashmak. It must not be understood that I had looked away from her for long. The period of our extreme peril did not in reality cover more than a few minutes. Like the crisis of a fever, it was slow in coming, but it passed quickly, though we needed some time to realize the fact.

But when I looked again at Regina Barry I found her as little disturbed as a woman could possibly have been in that special situation. Not to be hurled again into my arms, she held now to the hand-rail that runs along cabin walls; but she watched me rather than the ocean. I was her charge and the ocean was not. The blue-gray streak that had held her attention for a while was visible

only when the turnings of the ship threw it into view; otherwise we had nothing to see on the starboard side except an infinitude of billows with curling white crests.

To resume something like the customary attitude of human beings toward each other I said, as casually as I could manage, "You came over here just after I did, didn't you?"

Having purposely framed my sentence in just those words, it was some satisfaction to get the result I was playing for. It took all the aplomb—a rather shy aplomb —of which she was mistress to answer in a way that wouldn't underscore my meaning.

"Possibly; but I don't remember when you came over."

Having given the date of my sailing, I added, "And you left with Evelyn a little more than three weeks later?"

"Since you know everything, you naturally know that." She took on the old air of being at once smiling and defiant as she asked, "And has the fact any special significance?"

"That's what I want to find out." Before she could protest that there was no such significance I put the question, "How did you come to know her?"

"Is she so terribly difficult to know?"

"Not in the least; only, you'd never seen her in your life at the time when"—I gathered all my innermost strength together to bring the words out—"at the time when I talked to you last."

She, too, gathered her innermost strength together, rising to the reference gallantly.

"Oh, well, a good many things have happened since then."

Before going further I was obliged to pause and reckon how much I dared. Of the many sensitive points in my history, we were touching on the most sensitive. I was fully aware that since the sleeping dog was sleeping it might be better to let him lie. Once he was roused, there might be a new set of perils to deal with, perils we could avoid by softly stepping round them. That Paolo should go one way in space and Francesca another seemed to be decreed by inevitable fate; so why interfere with the process?

I should probably not have interfered with it had the circumstances not raised us above the sphere of our ordinary interests. The roar of the wind, the tumult of the sea, the plunging of the ship, the indescribable whining of shells, the knowledge of danger—were as the orchestra which lifts the duet to emotional planes that dialogue alone could never attain to. Though our words might be commonplace, every syllable was charged with tones and overtones and undertones of meaning to be seized by something more subtle than intelligence. Prudence might have said, "Let everything alone," but that urging of the being which escapes the leash of prudence drove me on to speak.

"Do you remember when I talked to you last?"

She answered with the detachment of a witness under compulsion to tell the truth. The personal was as far as possible eliminated from her voice.

"Perfectly."

"We—we seemed to—to break off in the middle of a conversation."

"Which you never gave me any further opportunity of going on with."

The statement took my breath away. For some seconds

I could only stare at her as a truthful man stares when he hears himself given the lie direct.

"Did you—did you—want to go on with it?" I managed to stammer at last.

"What do you think?"

"I—I didn't think that. I waited nearly two hours."

"And if you'd only waited a few minutes more—"

I leaned down toward her, breaking in on her words with a sense of what I might have lost: "Everything would have been different? You were going to say that?"

She took time to raise her hands and adjust the yashmak, giving me the clue to her reason for wearing it. It was putting on a vizor before going into battle. Knowing that she would be thrown into some difficult situations, she had taken this method of being as far as possible screened against embarrassment.

She was successful in that. Apart from the shifting surface fire of her eyes and the slightest possible tremor in her voice I saw no rift in the barricade of her composure.

"No; that isn't what I was going to say. I don't know how things would have been. I suppose they would have been as—as they are now."

"But we could have talked them over."

"If you'd waited."

"I should have waited forever if I'd known."

"Or if," she went on, with the same serenity, "you hadn't disappeared next day without leaving an address. I tried to find you—as well as I could, that is—without seeming to hunt you down."

I explained that when I left New York on that last Monday in June, 1914, I had not expected to be gone for more than a few weeks—just the time to recover from

the first effects of the blow I thought her scorn had dealt to me.

"It was curious, though," I went on, "that that name, Gavrilo Prinzip, should have hammered itself in on my brain. I recall it now as about the only thing I could think of. I didn't know what it meant, and I was far from supposing it the touchstone of human destinies that it afterward proved to be; but in some unreasoning way it held me. It was like the meaningless catch of a tune with which you can't go on, till all at once you see it finishes in—"

"In a trumpet-call. Yes, I know. You had to follow it. So had I. I don't think there's much more than that to be said."

The blue-gray streak was again on the starboard side, but comfortingly far astern. Though we were still within her range, we were getting the benefit of distance. At the same time some one called our attention to a blotch of black smoke, far down on the eastern horizon. A destroyer was coming to our aid.

I went back to the point we had partially forsaken.

"How long did you expect me to wait that afternoon?"

She looked down at the deck, answering with a perceptible infusion of the bitter in her tone.

"I didn't fix a time. I wasn't sitting with my watch in my hand."

"But I was."

"Evidently."

"Why didn't you come down?"

"I came down as soon as I could."

"What kept you?"

She raised her eyes for a fleeting glance—lowering them again. At the same time her voice sank, too,

so that in the fury of sound about us she was no more than audible.

"The thing you told me."

"And that kept you—in what way?"

"In the way of making everything—different."

"How much does that mean—different?"

"It means a good deal."

"Can't you tell me exactly?"

"I can't tell you exactly; but it was something like this." She fixed her eyes on me steadily. "When they first opened the Subway in New York I came up out of a station one winter afternoon just as the lights were lit, and instead of going to the right, as I should have done, I turned to the left. When I had walked about fifteen minutes I was dazed. Though I was in a part of New York I knew perfectly well, I couldn't recognize anything. It was all a confusion of lights. I couldn't tell which of the streets ran north and south, or which were east and west, or what the buildings were that I'd been used to seeing all my life. In the end some one took me into a drug-store and made me sit down till I had time to reorientate myself."

"But you did it in the end?"

"That time—yes."

"And this time? The time we're talking about?"

Whir-r-r! Z-z-z! P-ff!

Bang!

Whir-r-r! Z-z-z! P-ff!

Bang!

From the port side there came something like a feeble cheer—a chorus of rough male voices and high female screams, timid and yet glad.

A new swing of our crazed leviathan disclosed the reason

for this wavering, victorious cry. There were two more blobs of smoke on the horizon, and from different points on the Irish coast three huge birds were flying like messengers from some god. Moreover, the blob of smoke we had first seen now had a considerable stretch of the ocean behind her, and in front a parting of the spray like two white plumes as she tore in our direction.

"She sure is some little ripper!" came a dry Yankee voice in the group about life-boat No. 5.

"Thirty-five knots if it's one."

"Them 'planes 'll overtake her, though, and be on the spot as soon as she is."

"Gosh! I'd like to see Fritzie then!"

"J'ever see a kingfisher sweep down on a gudgeon?"

"Gee-whiz! Look at Fritzie! Goin' to submerge!"

And sure enough, as we stared, the blue-gray streak began to sink behind the waves, becoming to the imagination even more a giant deep-sea reptile after it had gone.

Almost simultaneously our leviathan calmed down, resuming her straight course. It was done apparently with the wordless, unexplained inconsequence with which a runaway horse will suddenly fall into a peaceful trot. There was no stopping to salute the destroyers and 'planes that were hastening to our help or to exchange confidences with them as to our common enemy. There was neither hail nor farewell as we forged again toward the open sea.

Danger being considered past, the groups broke up, intermingling with sighs of relief. The Consolatrice and her friend came to exchange a few words with us, and Miss Prynne returned from the boat to which she had good-naturedly exchanged. While I thanked her for

this kindness, as if it had been done for myself, I saw Miss Barry trying to slip off.

By stepping out of my corner and assuming a limp lamer than my actual disability warranted I was able to intercept her.

"I wonder," I made bold to ask, "if you could give me a hand back to the music-room?"

The yashmak was not so impervious but that I could detect behind it the scarlet glimmer of her smile.

"Oh, I think you could get there by yourself. Try."

"I can manage the deck," I said, in the tones of a boy feigning an indisposition to stay away from school, "but I'm afraid of the steps of the companionway."

"How would you have managed if I hadn't been here?" she asked, as she allowed me to lean ever so lightly on her arm.

The steps of the companionway presenting a more real difficulty than I had expected, I could say nothing till with her aid I had lowered myself safely down.

Postponing the pleasure of thanking her, I reverted to the topic the last attack had interrupted.

"I want to hear about your reorientation. You were able to put the streets in their proper place again, and to see New York as it was; but in my case—"

She put out her hand with that air which there is no gainsaying.

"I'm rather tired. I think I must go to my cabin and have a rest." She added, however, not very coherently: "The way things happen is in general the best way—if we know how to use it."

Somewhat desperately, because of her determination to go, I burst out, "And do you think all this has been the best way?"

"You must see for yourself that it's been a very good way. We've been able to do—to do the things we've both done." But the admission in the use of the first personal plural pronoun seemed suddenly to alarm her. She took refuge again in her need of rest. "I really must be off. If we don't meet again before we leave the boat—"

"Oh, but we shall!"

"I'm very often confined to my cabin."

"Not when you want to be out of it."

"Very well, then; I very often don't leave my cabin."

I was holding the hand she had extended to say good-by, but she slipped it away and was going.

"Then tell me this—just this," I begged. "How is it that we're both on the same ship? That didn't happen by accident?"

Whether she refused to answer my question or whether it didn't reach her I couldn't tell. All I got in response was a long, oblique regard—the fleeing farewell look of Beatrice Cenci—as she carried her secrets and mysteries away with her.

CHAPTER XXI

SO my celibacy of the will was threatened. I mean by that that I found myself with two main objects of thought instead of one. Having vowed myself to a cause, a woman had supervened with that pervasiveness of presence with which a perfume fills a room. I might still vow myself to the cause, but I shouldn't serve it as I had meant to, with heart and senses free.

Or should I?

The question fundamentally was that. Could I at a time like this divide my allegiance as I should be obliged to divide it by falling in love and being married? Or ought I, in deference to the work I was to do, suppress this old passion and smother the problems and curiosities it had begun to rouse in me?

If, in view of the many men who have been good soldiers and equally good husbands, this hesitation seems far-fetched to you, I must beg you to remember what I have told you already, that my mission, such as it was, had become my life. For this the inspiration sprang from what I had seen for myself. What I had seen for myself compelled me to believe that the world was divided into just two camps—those who fought the Germans and those who did not. "He that is not with me is against me," I was prepared to say; except that for the small bordering nations, whom the arch-enemy could have crushed as he had crushed Belgium and Serbia before any one else could save them, I was ready to make long allow-

ances. I couldn't make these allowances for the United States; and to win the friends I valued so highly to joining in the task that seemed to me the most pressing before mankind was the work to which I longed to give myself every minute of the day.

No consecrated soldier of a holy war had ever been moved by a purer singleness of purpose than I when I came on board the *Assiniboia;* and now I was already thinking most of something else. As violently—I choose the adverb—as if I had never seen this woman's image grow fainter and fainter in my memory I craved to know certain things about her.

I might state those things in this way: Why, in the summer in which I joined the army and went across with the first Canadian contingent, did she seek the acquaintance of my sister Evelyn and undertake nursing in her company? Why did she join my sister Mabel and steal in and out of my room when I was blind? Why, since I was blind, did she keep her presence unknown to me and swear my sisters to secrecy? Why was she coming back on board this boat? Did she really care for me? And if she really cared for me, why this air of ever so courteous, ever so gentle constraint the minute we were alone and I broached any subject that was personal?

Was she angry? Was she contrite? Was she wounded? Was she scornful? Was she proud? Or was she simply subjecting me to one more test, which might end again in her being disappointed?

I have to confess that these inquiries already absorbed my soul in such a way that I forgot that on which I had been accustomed to meditate every hour of my time—the approach I was to make to American citizens like Beady Lamont and Ralph Coningsby. Against this weaning

away of my heart some essential loyalty cried, "Treason!" I was the man who had put his hand to the plow and was looking back. If I continued to look back I might easily prove unfit for the kingdom of heaven as I conceived of it.

Throughout the next day I was eager to test the effect of these counter-inclinations on myself. That I could only do by meeting her. If I met her, would she be to me simply what the Consolatrice was to a more intimate degree? Or should I find her the brave, aspiring, provocative spirit that had led me up the path that had begun to mount from the moment when I first saw her—only in the end to let me fall over the edge of a precipice? I wanted to see; I wanted to be sure.

But she kept me waiting. She didn't appear that day. It was a fine day for the ocean in November, with a tolerably smooth sea. It was not weather, therefore, that confined her to her cabin; it was something else. She knew I would be on the watch for her, and she let me have my labor for my pains.

It was the kind of advance and recession with which I had least patience. On Thursday morning I kept no watch for her. Swearing that she meant no more to me than Miss Prynne and that my work in life was too serious to allow any woman to interfere with it, I gave myself to the reading of books on the war situation as it affected America. If she was playing a game, she would learn that it was not one of solitaire. Two could take a hand at it, and with equal skill. I prided myself on that skill when sometime in the latter part of Thursday afternoon she passed my chair in the music-room—the sixth sense told me it was she—and I did not look up from Sheering's Oxford lectures on "The War and World Repentance."

Though my eye followed the passage, I got little or no sense from it.

"Human effort after human welfare is never drastic enough," I read. "It is never sufficiently radical to accomplish the purpose it tries to carry out. Instead of laying its ax at the root of the tree of its ills it is content to hack off a few branches. It never gets beyond pruning-work; and the most one can say of the results it achieves is that they are better than nothing.

"So much, then, one can affirm of the dreams that are now being dreamed, in all probability to vanish with waking. They are better than nothing. Better than nothing are the aims held up before the Allied nations as the citadels they are to capture. The crushing of military despotism is better than nothing; the elimination of war is better than nothing; the establishment of universal democracy, the founding of a league of nations, the formation of a league to enforce peace, the dissemination of a world-wide entente, these are all of them better than nothing, even though they end in being no more productive of permanent blessing than the Hague Conference, which was better than nothing in itself. They are probably as effective as anything that man, with his reason, his wisdom, his science, his degree of self-control, and his pathetic persistence in believing in himself when that belief has so unfailingly been blasted, can ever attain to. But, oh, gentlemen, as the prophet said thirty centuries ago, 'This is not the way, neither is this the city.' You are pouring out blood; you are pouring out money; you are giving your sons and your daughters to pass through the fire to Moloch; through the fire to Moloch unflinchingly they pass; you are tearing the hearts out of your own bodies, and you are doing it with a heroism

that cannot fail of some reward. But this is not the way, neither is this the city. It is better than nothing, but it is not the best. You could do it all so much more thoroughly, so much more easily. You will accomplish something; there is no question about that; but till you take the right way, and attack the city of which you must become masters, that great good thing for which you are fighting will still be a vision of the future."

But with the knowledge that this woman had simply passed and let her shadow fall upon me I had no heart for Sheering's impassioned words. I got up and followed her.

I found her on deck, far forward, leaning on the rail and watching a fiery, angry sunset that inflamed all the western horizon. As she looked round and saw me advancing along the deck I detected in her telltale eyes the first scared impulse to run away.

But what was she afraid of?

It was the question I asked as soon as I was near enough to speak.

"What makes you think I'm afraid of anything?"

"The way you looked. You see, this queer sort of veil doesn't protect you; it gives you away by throwing all your expression into your eyes. There's an essence that eludes one till it's concentrated and distilled."

"I'm sure I didn't mean—"

"To look like an animal trying to escape? Well, you did."

"Oh, as to that, I could easily have walked round the deck-house to the other side of the ship."

"If the discourtesy wouldn't have been too obvious—of course!" But I didn't press the point. There were other admissions to which I had an unchivalrous craving

to bring her if I could; and so I went on, artfully, "It was clever of you to find my state-room on Tuesday—all on the spur of the moment like that."

She contented herself with murmuring, "Yes, wasn't it?"

"And your own cabin is on another deck."

"I'm on this deck."

"So that you hadn't even seen me going in and out."

"I'm a nurse—in a way. Nurses have to know more than other passengers or they'd be no good on board ship."

"And do you know every one's cabin?"

"I know every one's cabin to whom I can be useful."

"Is that many?"

"No; not many, unfortunately." She diverted the attack by saying, "What are you asking for?"

"Oh, for nothing," I answered, carelessly. I added, however, with some slight show of intention, "I've called it your cleverness, but I really mean it as your kindness."

She decided to take the bull by the horns, shifting her position and standing with her back to the rail.

"If you call it kindness that I should have learned the number and location of your cabin before we left Liverpool—"

"Oh, you did it then?"

"Yes, I did it then. But if you call it kindness, of course I can't prevent you. I can only assure you it isn't. I knew you couldn't get about easily—"

"How did you know that?"

"I saw you come on board. Wasn't that enough?"

"Then let me go farther back and ask how you happened to see me come on board. Wasn't it an extraordinary coincidence that you should have been there, right at the head of the gangway?"

"Well, life is full of extraordinary coincidences, isn't it? And when a woman who can do so little sees a wounded man—"

There were other wounded men scattered about the deck. I glanced at them as I said, "And have you done that for all the wounded men on board?"

"I've done it for all I know."

"And how many do you know?"

She averted her profile, with an air of having had enough of the subject.

"I wanted you to tell me a minute ago why you were asking me these questions, and you said for nothing." I could see her smile behind the chiffon of the yashmak as she went on, "Since that's your only reason, perhaps you won't mind if I don't answer you."

"But if I had a reason for asking, would you tell me then?"

"Wouldn't it have to depend on the reason?"

"You're very careful."

She shot a daring, smiling glance at me as she riposted, "Well, aren't you?" Before I had time to recover from the slight shock that these words dealt me she pointed to the horizon. "See, there's smoke over there. I do hope it's not another U-boat."

I accepted the diversion—for more reasons than one. Of these the first was the shock to which I have alluded. She saw through me. That is, she saw I didn't place her first. How she saw it I could no more tell than she could tell how I knew her history of the past two years. But the tables were turned and turned in such a way as to make me feel ridiculous. A man who is careful with regard to a woman is always slightly grotesque.

As my most skilful defense lay in feigning a lack of per-

ception I talked about U-boats and the experience of two days before; but I came away from her with a feeling of discomfort.

I analyzed the feeling of discomfort as due to the repetition of our mutual attitude more than two years previously. Where she came forward I drew back. I had always drawn back. I used to suppose that nothing but one motive could have driven me to this humiliating course, and now I was taking it from another. I was taking it from another, and she knew it. The essence of the humiliation lay in that.

Each time I met her on deck she betrayed a hesitation that I found harder to bear than contempt. Her very effort to preserve a tone of friendliness was a reproach to me. It seemed to say: "You see all I've done for you. You accept it and give me nothing in return."

And yet I was obliged to consider that which, were I to let myself be nothing but myself, might lie before me in the next few weeks and months. I should arrive in New York as a man engaged to be married. As a man engaged to be married I should be at once enveloped in that silken net of formalities with which women with their consecration to the future of the race have invested all that pertains to the preliminaries of mating. I had seen for myself that in America that silken net is more elaborate than it is elsewhere. In any British community it is spun of tissue, fragile, light, easily swept aside should the need arise. In America it is solidly constructed of gold cord, and is as often as not adorned with gems. In America an engagement leads to something of an anti-climax in that, from the human point of view, it is more important than a marriage. It is sung by a chorus of matrons and maidens and social correspondents of the press in a

volume far more resounding than that of the nuptial hymn. That a man should marry after he has become engaged is considered as much a matter of course as that he should fight after he has enlisted; but that he should become engaged is like taking that first oath which denotes his willingness to give himself up, to make the great renunciation for the sake of something else. More than any single or signal act of bravery that comes later, it is the thing that counts. I am not quarreling with American social custom; I am only saying that I had reasons for being afraid of it.

I should arrive in New York as a man engaged to be married, and as a man engaged to be married I should be put through paces as strict and as stately as those of the minuet. There would be no escape from it. I might be promised in advance an escape from it, but the promise would not be kept. I might be promised simplicity, privacy, secrecy, a mere process of handfasting before the least noticeable of legal authorities; but all would go by the board.

Whatever my future wife and I might say—and my future wife would say it only half-heartedly, if as earnestly as that—I should be seized in the soft, tender, irresistible embrace of the feminine in American life, the element that is far more powerful than any other, and I should have no more fight to put up than a new-born infant against a nurse. There would be a whole array of mothers and potential mothers to see that I had not. There would be Mrs. Barry and Annette van Elstine and Hilda Grace and Esther Coningsby and Elsie Coningsby and Mrs. Legrand, not to speak of a vast social army behind them, all supported and urged on by the unanimous power of the press.

No one of them would allow me to slip from their kindly, overwhelming attentions any more than bees would allow a queen. Like a queen bee is any man who is engaged to an American girl—or at least he was in the days, now so extraordinarily long ago, before America went into the war. Since then marriage has become casual, incidental, one of those hasty touches given to human life, which, like the possession of money or the pursuit of happiness or the leisure to earn a living, are pleasant but not vital. But in the America of the end of 1916, the mentally far-away America to which I was going back, matrimony was the most momentous happening in a life history. From the minute a man became engaged to that when he turned away from the altar, he had to give himself up to his condition. He was no longer his own. Dinners, lunches, parties, theaters, publicity, and the approval of women claimed him; and shrinking was of no avail.

To the life after marriage, from this point of view, my mind hardly worked forward. I have spoken of men who were good soldiers and equally good husbands. Undoubtedly there are hundreds of thousands in the class. But I had seen not a little of men who, because they were husbands, would gladly not have been soldiers at all. Theirs was not a divided allegiance, for they had only one. The body was in the fight, and it did wondrously; but the heart and soul and mind and craving were with the wife and little ones; and who could blame them?

But all my personal desire was not to be of their number. Had I been married before the war I should have been as they; but since I was free to espouse the cause which had become mistress of everything I was I wanted to espouse it.

I thought I had espoused it. I had considered myself bone of its bone and flesh of its flesh. During my months of fighting it had been a satisfaction to think of myself as at liberty to make any sacrifice of limb or life, and leave no heart to bewail me, no eye to shed a tear, and no care to spring up behind me. My family would be content to say, "Poor old Frank, he did his duty!" Further than that, I should bring no regret to any heart but Lovey's; and of him I was persuaded that if I went he wouldn't wait long after me. Moreover, I had guarded against any too great misfortune overtaking him by providing for him in my will.

I must own, furthermore, to another misgiving: I was not too sure of myself from the point of view of the old failing.

Things had happened in the trenches—they had dosed me with brandy, whisky, rum, any restorative that came handy, on a number of occasions—and there had been something within me as ready to be waked as a tiger to the taste of blood. I can say truthfully enough that I had never yielded to the desire of my own deliberate act; but I must also say truthfully that I was by no means sure that one day I might not do so. We had talked often enough, as men with men, of what we called a moral moratorium—and the talk haunted me with all manner of suggestions. The ban on what is commonly called sin was to be lifted for the period of the war; and we who had to deny ourselves so much were not to deny ourselves anything that came easily within our grasp. It seemed an alluring condition, and one which, without waiting for the license of supreme war councils or the permission of the Church, each of us was tempted to inaugurate for himself. In a situation in which that which is born of the flesh is

flauntingly before one's eyes, and millions of men are thrown together as flesh and little more, appetite has its mouth wide open. That man was strong indeed who could ignore this yearning of the body; and that man was not I.

So again the consciousness of freedom was like a reserve fund to a corporation. It was something on which to fall back if everything else was swept away. I didn't want to go to the devil; but if I went no one would suffer but myself, as no one would suffer but myself if a German sniper were to blow the top off my head. Mind you, I am not saying that I came back morally weakened from the war; I only came back with a sense that one man's life or death—one man's ruin or salvation—was of no more account than the fate of a roadside bit of jewel-weed amid the infinite seed-time and harvest of the year. I was inured to loss of all kinds on a stupendous scale. I had seen thousands blown to pieces beside me, and my mind had not turned aside to regret them; thousands would see me blown to pieces with the same indifference as to whether I lived or died. Callousness as to the life and death of others induces callousness as to one's own; and compared to life and death, what is the control of a mere appetite? No; I was not morally weakened; but I was morally benumbed. There was a kind of moral moratorium in my consciousness. I repeat that I wasn't practically making use of it; but I was in a period of suspense in which I admitted to myself that it might depend on circumstances whether I made use of it or not.

And if I did, and if I was married. . . .

From the sheer possibility my mind turned in dismay. To the celibacy made urgent by a purpose I added the celibacy necessitated by a curse. As the one counseled

me not to involve myself with anybody else, so the other warned me not to involve anybody else with me. Through warning and counsel I had kept myself in something like a state of serenity till now.

It was a state of serenity with just one dominating impulse—to get back among the comrades with whom I had already found shelter. Whatever I had that could be called a homing instinct was bound for the house in Vandiver Street. There had been times when I thought I had outlived that phase, times when what seemed like a new and higher companionship, with a new and higher place in the world and in men's esteem, half persuaded me that I was so little the waster in fact and the criminal in possibility that the Down and Out was no more to me than a sloughed skin to the creature that has thrown it off. But I always waked from this pleasant fancy to see myself as in essentials the same gaunt, tattered, hungry fellow who had come with his buddy to beg a meal and a bed of the Poor Brothers of the Order of Pity, who never refused any homeless, besotted man. No matter what battles I fought, what medals I won, what banquets I was asked to sit down at, my place was among them; and among them I hoped to do my work. They were all American citizens, with as much weight, when it came to the franchise, as the moneyed potentates of Wall Street. As being not only my brethren, but a nucleus of public opinion as well, I had had no other vision before me for my return than that of sharing their humble refreshments and talk, together with that blind, desperate, devoted fraternity which made a city of refuge of the home that had once been Miss Smedley's.

And since coming on board that vision was threatened by another—one in which I saw myself moving amid com-

pliments and flowers and polite conventions, in all the entangling convolutions of the silken net. Whether it would be with or without love was, in my state of mind, beside the mark. Love had ceased to be, for the time being, at any rate, the ruling factor in a man's decisions about himself. There was a moratorium of love, let there be one of morals or not. "I've got to," had been the reply to love made by twenty millions of men all over the world, either under compulsion or of their own free will; and women had accepted the answer valiantly.

The difficulty in my case sprang of choice. "I've got to" wasn't imperative enough. Or if imperative, it was imperative on both sides equally.

CHAPTER XXII

AND then a word was said which, though solving no problems, opened up a new line of suggestion.

I have spoken of Regina Barry as another transmigrated soul. I have said that I could not tell at a glance in what direction her spirit had traveled; nor could I after some days of intercourse. As much as she had been frank and open in the other period of our acquaintance, she had now become mystery to me—elusive, tantalizing, sealed. By the end of a few days I began to perceive that she came near me only, as I might say, officially. If there was danger or storm or darkness—we sailed without lights—she was within reach of me. She was within reach of me many a time if I wanted no more than a book that had fallen or a rug that had been left elsewhere on the deck. It was strange how hovering and protective her presence could be for the moment of need, and how far withdrawn the minute I could get along alone.

And far withdrawn the transmigrated spirit seemed to me at all times. Do what I would to traverse the distance, I found her as remote as ever. Do what I would to break down her defenses or transcend them, they still rose between us, impalpable, impregnable, and all but indiscernible. She had traveled away from me as I had traveled away from her; and yet now that we met in space there was some indefinable bond between us.

It was in right of that bond that I asked her one day why she was going home.

"Oh, for all sorts of reasons." She added, "One of them is on account of father."

"Isn't he well?"

"Yes, he's well enough. That isn't it."

As she did not explain, I refrained from asking further, not because I didn't want to know, but because I knew she would tell me.

It was our usual trysting-place, the deck rail, though not now that which ran along the side of the ship, but the one across the portion of the upper deck toward the bow, allowing us to look down on the pit in which the few steerage passengers took the air. They were standing about in helpless, idle groups, some ten or twelve oddly clad, oddly hatted men, with three or four of their women, and a white staring baby, whose fingers, as it hung over its mother's shoulder, dangled like bits of string.

We were in the Gulf Stream, so that the day was comparatively mild. A north wind not too violent blew away the possibility of fog and sent an occasional shaft of sunshine through the rifts in the great gray clouds. The swell left over from the gale of the past few days tossed the ship's nose into the air with a long, slow, rhythmic heave, slightly to port, and gave to good sailors like ourselves that pleasant sensation of swinging which a bird must get on a tree.

Wind and water were fraught with the nameless peaceful intimations of the New World after the turmoil of the Old one. It is difficult to say how one seizes them, but they come with the Gulf Stream. I have always noticed that half-way over there is a change in the aura, the atmosphere. It throws a breath of balsam on the wind, and flashes on the waves that gleam which Cabot, Jacques Cartier, and the Pilgrims saw when they sighted land.

It is that wonderful sense of going westward which, I suppose, is primal to the instinct. Going eastward, one is going back to beginnings, to things lived, to things over and done with. Going westward, all is hope. It is the onward reach, the upward grasp, the endless striving. It is the lifting of the hands, the straining of the power to achieve, the yearning of the inner man. The thing that is finished is left behind, and the thing to be wrestled with and done is in front of one. The very sun goes before one with a splendid gesture of beckoning—on to work, on to self-denial, on to triumph and success—and when it sets it sets with a promise of a morrow.

We had already begun to feel that; and on my part in a spirit of compunction. I was going, as far as lay within my small powers, to turn the west back upon the east again, to reverse nature by making the stream flow toward its source. I was far from insensible to the pity of it, for I had seen the effect on my own country.

I had seen my own country—that baby giant, whose very existence as a country antedated but little the year when I was born—I had seen it pause in its work, in its play, in its task of self-development—listen—shiver—thrill—throw down the ax, the spade, the hammer, the pick—go up from the field, the factory, and the mine—and offer itself willingly. It was to me as if that was fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet:

"I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me."

I had seen that first flotilla of thirty-one ships sail down the St. Lawrence, out into the ocean, and over to the shores of England, as the first great gift of men which the New World had ever made to the Old, as some return

for all the Old had poured out upon the New. I had seen it, for I was on it. We went gaily, as hop-pickers go to a bean-feast. We knew it was war, but the word had no meaning for us. What it meant we found out at Ypres, at Vimy, at Lens. But when I think of my country now I think of her no longer as a baby giant. She has become a girl widow—valiant, dry-eyed, high-souled, ready to go on with the interrupted work and do bigger work—but a widow all the same.

And the sword that had pierced one heart I was bringing to pierce another. I was sorry; but sorrow didn't keep me, couldn't keep me from being terribly in earnest.

And in on these thoughts Regina Barry broke as if she had been following them.

"Look at the waves where the sun catches them. Aren't they like flashing steel? It's just as if all the drowned hands at the bottom of the sea were holding up swords to the people of America, begging them to go and fight."

I looked at her, startled. "You feel that way?"

She looked at me, indignant. "Certainly. How else could I feel?"

"Oh, I didn't know. Americans feel so many different ways."

"Because they don't know. I'm going back"—she gave a light, deprecating laugh—"I'm going back to tell them."

I was still more startled. "Tell whom?"

"Any one I know. Every one knows some one. I don't mean to say that I'm a Joan of Arc; but I shall do what I can."

"And how shall you begin?"

"I'll begin with father and with—"

She stopped at the second name, though to me the fact did not become significant till afterward.

"That's what I meant," she resumed, "when I said I was going back on his account."

"You mean?"

"He doesn't see why we should be in it. He's like so many Americans; he hasn't emerged from the eighteen-hundreds. He still thinks of the New World as if it was a new creation that had nothing to do with the Old. He doesn't see that there's only one world and one race of men, wherever they are and whatever they do. To him Americans are like souls that get over to paradise. They're safe and can afford to dwell safely. They're no longer concerned with the sorrows and struggles of the people left on earth."

It was to get light on my own way that I asked, "And what are you going to say to convince him?"

"I don't know yet. I shall say what the moment suggests."

"And you're sure it will suggest something?"

Her great eyes burned like coals as she turned them on me in protest at the question.

"Suggest something? You might as well ask if the air suggests something. It suggests that I breathe it; but I don't have to think of it beforehand, when the whole world is full of it."

"Full of what?"

She considered the question, finding in it all I meant to put there.

"I don't know," she answered at last. "That is, I don't know in any sense that would go into a few words. There's so much of it. The minute you try to express it from any one point of view you find you're inadequate."

I was still seeking light.

"But when you try to do it from several points of view —correlating them?"

"Even then—" She paused, reflecting, shaking her head as she went on again, as if to shake away a consciousness of the impossible. "I don't try. There's no use in trying. It's so immense—so far beyond me. It's grown so, too. When it first began I could more or less compass it—or, I thought I could. Now it's become like nature—or God—or any of the colossal infinite conceptions—it means different things to different minds."

"That is, we can only take of it what we take of the ocean—each a few drops—no one able to take all?"

"Something like that. And we can only give a few drops—just what we've got the measure to take up—some a little more, some a little less—but no one more than a little as compared to the whole. That's why I'm not going to try to explain."

"Then how are you going to make them understand?"

"I'll tell them—I'll do what I can to show them—that the greatest movement of all time is going on—and America is taking no national part in it. I'll try to make them see that it isn't just to avenge the few American lives lost through the U-boats, or to free Belgium, or to put down autocracy, or to do any one or two or three of the things that have been set before us. It isn't even the whole of them, just taken as so many human motives."

"But you'll have to tell them what it is, won't you? It won't do just to put before them what it isn't."

"But how can I? How can any one? It would be like trying to tell them what nature is. It's a universal composite, made up of everything; but you couldn't go

about the country explaining it in lectures. The nearest I could come to it would be in saying that it's the great dramatic conflict between good and evil to which human nature has been working up ever since it committed its first sin; but the words in which to do that have been so hard worked and are so terribly worn that they've become a kind of ditty. It seems to me best just to talk to them simply—and let them construct the monster out of the bones I lay before them. They'll do it. The public is not very quick, but when it gets going it's pretty instinctive."

"Oh, then you're going to tackle the public?"

"I'm going to tackle any one to whom I can get access."

"You spoke just now of lectures."

"I'll speak of anything that will help me to get the message across. That's why I mention father and—" Again she hesitated at a name, going on with an elision: —"first of all. They are simply the first I shall be able to talk to. As a matter of fact, not many as yet have been over there and come back to America—so that there's a good deal of curiosity still unsatisfied—and so one will get a chance. You must have noticed already how dearly Americans, especially the women, like to be talked to. We're talked to so much by experts on all subjects that we should burst with knowledge if our minds weren't like those swimming-tanks with fresh water running in and out of them all the time."

"So you're really going to make it a kind of business?"

She spread her hands apart, palms outward.

"What else can I do? I assure you it isn't any desire for publicity or that sort of thing. I'm just—I'm just driven on. It's like what some one says in the Bible—I've taken to reading the Bible lately—it seems the only

thing big enough in spirit to go with the big times—but some one says there: 'Woe unto me, if I preach not the gospel!' Well, it's the same way with me. Woe unto me if I don't do this thing! It's taken possession of me; I can't do anything else; and so I'm going back—"

I was expressing but one of the host of thoughts that crowded on me as I said: "You've got the tremendous advantage of being an American. You can say what you like. If I were—"

She stood off and surveyed me. "You don't need to say anything. You speak for yourself. One has only to look at you."

I smiled ruefully. "I know I'm pretty well battered up."

"Oh, it isn't that."

"What is it, then?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's just—it's just everything. You're a type. I'm not speaking of you personally, but of a lot—hundreds—thousands—I've seen—young fellows who make me think of some other words in the Bible."

"What are they?"

"They're in Isaiah, I think. Everybody knows them." She recited in a smooth, rich voice that gave new beauty to the familiar passage: "'Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: . . . He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.'" Her voice rose—and fell again. "'He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers

is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.'" She resumed in a colloquial tone: "I've seen so much of that, haven't you? The lamb led dumb to the slaughter, and the quiet, wounded man hardly opening his mouth for a moan. It's heartbreaking."

"And yet you'd bring your own people into it."

"Because it's sublime. Because I've seen for myself that the people who take part in it are raised to levels they never knew it was possible to reach. Haven't you found the same thing for yourself?"

"Oh, I? I'm only—"

"You're a man—and a young man. You're a young man who's been—I can't express it. It's all in that fact. The people at home will only have to look at you to see what language could never put before them. Language isn't equal to it. Imagination isn't equal to it when the thing is over. Don't you find that? Doesn't it often seem to you, now that you're out of it, as if it was a dream that had half escaped you? You try to tell it—and you can't. That's why the people who've been there and come back so often have nothing to say. That's why so many of the books—except those that contain diaries jotted down on the minute—that are written afterward are so often disappointing. It's like a great secret in every man's soul that he knows and thinks about, and can never get out of him. So I shall make no attempt to do more than to tell the little things, the small human details—"

You will see that I was following my own train of thought as I broke in, "But New York life will get hold of you again."

"It can't get hold of me again, because there will be nothing for it to catch on by. That's all over for me.

It could no more seize anything I am now than you or I"— she pointed to a flock of little birds riding up and down on a long, smooth billow—"from the deck of this ship could catch one of those Mother Carey's chickens."

My sensations were those of a man who has received an extraordinary bit of good news, like that of a great artistic triumph or the inheritance of a fortune. It was something that went to the foundations of life, bathing them in security and peace. As we continued to talk the swing of the boat became the lulling of strong arms.

The conflict of which for the past few days my mind had been the battle-ground was suddenly appeased. Woman, love, marriage, the more comforting elements in life—were no longer in opposition to what had become a man's pressing and sacred duties. There could be a love which asked for no moratorium; or rather, there could be a woman with the courage of a soldier.

I began to see her as comparable to that crusader's wife who, disguised as a page, followed her lord on his journeys, to share his perils and minister to his needs. In a modern girl it was not only romantic; it was adorable. That it should have been done for me was beyond my power to believe. None but the bravest and most daring spirit would have attempted it—none but the heart capable of climbing higher and more adventurously still. I had known her for a gallant soul from that midnight minute when she pulled aside her hangings and found me lurking in her chamber; but I had never made a forecast of the heroisms and fidelities expanding here like the beauty from the heart of a rose.

CHAPTER XXIII

SO we came to that last evening on board, of which I must now tell you. It had taken me the intervening time to get used to the new outlook. The habit of seeing myself surrounded by a whole stockade of prohibitions was too strong to overcome in a flash. I had to let my mind emerge into freedom gently, telling myself each day that with a wife like this I could serve the cause more devotedly than ever, since she would be serving it too.

Of that dedication to a cause I was possibly too much aware. My uniform made me aware of it. My game leg and my sightless eye made me aware of it. The need of whole peoples, like the French and British and Italian, of every man who could fire a gun or ram home a bayonet or speak a rousing word—that more than anything else seemed to put a consecration upon me of which I was as foolishly and yet as loftily conscious as a modern king, accustomed to a bowler hat, when he rides through the streets with his crown on.

And on the last evening there was enough of the ecstatic in the air to justify this sense of a mission.

The voyage, which had not been without the exciting stimulus of danger, was successfully over. The west was actually reached, and the things done left behind us. The things to be done were making our pulses beat faster and our energies yearn forward. To-morrow with its

summons to activity was more keenly in our consciousness than to-day. Doctors, nurses, returning soldiers, the sparse handful of business men—we were already in heart ashore, walking in streets, riding in tram-cars, eating in dining-rooms, sleeping in beds, taking part in hard work, and deeming these things a privilege. Voices and laughter in the clear, still night, and the clicking of heels on the deck, were part of the relief and joyousness.

Late in the afternoon we had picked up the Nantucket light-ship, which rested like a star on the water. Now the horizon was being strung with beads of light, one, two, three, or little clusters at a time, behind which we knew that advancing night was lighting myriads of lamps all the way to the Pacific. On the Atlantic coast it was already dark, with cities and towns ablaze, and villages and farm-houses lit by kindly, shimmering windows. In the Middle West it was twilight, with electrics spangling the office-buildings here and there, and pale-gold flowers strewn over the prairie floors. Beyond the Mississippi it would still be day, but day dissolving gorgeously, softly, into sunset and moonrise and the everlasting magic of the stars.

As she and I hung over the deck rail side by side we felt ourselves on the edge of wonders. The Old World was in need of us, and we were in need of the New. To us who were New World born, and who were coming back to generous, easy-going welcome after the unspeakable things we had seen, the craving for New World brotherhood and vigor was like that of hunger or thirst. This much we admitted in so many words—even she.

She was still elusive; she was still mysterious. Though during the past few days she had not resisted a certain habit as to the place and hour at which we should find

ourselves together and had been willing to talk freely on any theme connected with the cause, she took flight from a hint of the personal, like a bird at an approaching footstep.

Nevertheless, she was so far responsive as to say in answer to some question of mine, "My immediate plans—"

I broke in abruptly, "Let me tell you about your immediate plans."

As the deck was faintly illuminated, since we were again sailing with lights, I saw that change in her eyes which comes when a fire on a hearth bursts into a conflagration.

Probably my tone and the change in my manner had startled her.

"You? What?" she began, confusedly.

"I'll tell you what your plans are; but before that let me tell you something else."

She put up her hand. "Wait! Don't—"

But it was too late to stop me. I couldn't have stopped myself. I was carried on by the impetus that came from my having been so many years held back. I was no longer the consecrated servant of a cause. As for having been a drunkard and a thief, no shadow of remembrance stayed with me. I was simply a man head over heels in love with a woman, and in all sorts of stupid, stumbling phrases saying so.

She listened because she couldn't do anything else without walking away; but she listened with a kind of aloofness. With her clasped hands resting on the rail and her little, black silhouette held quietly erect, she gazed off toward a great white star, which I suppose must have been Capella, and heard my tale because she couldn't stop it.

"Listen," I went on, leaning on an arm extended along the rail. "I'll tell you your story. I've pieced it together and I know what it is. I didn't know it when I came on board. It puzzled me."

Her lips moved, but there was no turn of her head or stir of her person.

"Please don't. I'm—I'm not sure that I could bear it."

"Why shouldn't I? You've done certain things. Let me give you their interpretation."

"If I do—" she began, weakly.

I couldn't allow her to continue.

"I see now the explanation of so many things that bewildered me at first—that made me suffer. That day at Rosyth, for instance, when you went in and left me, you didn't despise or hate me. You may have been disillusioned—"

"It isn't the word," she murmured, still motionless, and looking off at the big white star. "I'd been thinking of you as the kind of man I'd—I'd been looking for so long."

"And you saw I was less so than any of the others."

"I'm not saying that. But if you think it was easy to tear up all one's conceptions by the roots and plant in new ones—however kindly—all at once—"

"Oh no, I don't! not now. But at that time I didn't know you. It's only been since coming on board and finding out what you've done—"

Curiosity prompted her to glance round at me.

"Then it was only since coming on board?"

"Oh, it was simple enough. It's silly to keep up the secret. I was talking, while we were still in the dock at Liverpool, with that handsome Canadian nurse."

"Miss Ogden. She was matron of the hospital at—"

"She knew who you were. She couldn't tell me your name, but she said—or Miss Prynne said—that you'd come over with Evelyn—that you'd been at Taplow with Mabel—"

"I know; the sort of thing that goes round among nurses."

"And so I put two and two together and formed a theory."

"You needn't tell me what it is. Please don't."

"But I want to." I hurried on before she could protest further. "When you saw that you'd—you'd hurt me—that day at Rosyth—and that I had disappeared—and gone into the army—and away to England—you got into touch with Evelyn—"

"I wanted to do something," she declared, in a tone of self-defense. "I couldn't help it when I knew the need was going to be so great. We didn't see that all at once, because we thought the war was going to be over in a very little while. But when we began to realize it wasn't—"

"Oh, I don't say you did it all on my account."

Though this was meant to provoke either admission or denial, she glided over it.

"It wasn't easy to do anything in New York, because we hadn't got that far as yet; and so I naturally went to Canada. When I did so Annette gave me a line of introduction to Evelyn."

"And you told her about me."

She fell into my trap so far as to say: "I didn't tell her. I simply let her guess."

"Guess what?"

"All I ever said to her in words was to ask her never to mention my name to you."

"But why?"

"I did the same with Lady Rideover when she took me on at Taplow."

"Why—again?"

"For the reason that—that if you ever came to find out what I was doing you'd misunderstand it; just as I see you—you do."

"But I don't. I don't misunderstand it when I say that in going to my sisters you wanted to be—you mustn't be offended!—you wanted to be near me—to watch over me as much as possible."

"You were the only man I knew at that time who'd taken the actual step of going to the war. If there'd been any others—"

"It wouldn't have mattered if there'd been a hundred. I don't misunderstand it when I say that as soon as you knew I was going home by this boat you arranged—"

"To go home by it too," she forestalled, quickly, "so that you should have somebody near you who could get about in the normal way in case there was danger. I admit that. It's perfectly true." She turned round on me with fire in her manner as well as in her eyes. "But what do you think I'm going home for?"

I repeated what she had said a few days before:

"You're going home on account of your father—and to interest him and other Americans in American duty as to the war."

"That's a reason; it's the reason I find it easiest to give. But I mustn't hide it from you now that—that I've—I've another."

I made one of my long mental leaps. I made it as a man might take the one chance of life in leaping a crevasse,

"You're going home to marry me."

"How can I be going home to marry you, when—when I never knew till within half an hour that you—that you cared anything about me?"

knowing that there are more chances that he will be dashed to pieces in the chasm

"You're going home to be married."

There was a kind of awe in the way she drew off from me.

"You're extraordinary," she breathed, faintly. "Miss Ogden didn't tell you that."

I had not cleared the crevasse. I was struggling desperately on the edge of it, while beneath me was the abyss.

"You're going home to marry me."

I think she gave a little bitter laugh. At any rate, there was the echo of it in her tone, as she said, with sardonic promptness: "How can I be going home to marry you, when—when I never knew till within half an hour that you—that you cared anything about me?"

I, too, must have laughed, the statement struck me as so absurd.

"What? You never knew—?"

She shook her head with an emphasis almost violent.

"You may have known," she said, in that voice which, after all, could not be called bitter, for the reason that it was reproachful, "but I'd come to the conclusion that" —she tried to carry the situation off with a second laugh, a laugh that ended as something like a sob—"that vou didn't."

I leaned down toward her, speaking the words right into her face.

"Didn't care?"

She nodded silently.

"For God's sake, what made you think that?"

"Oh—everything!"

"Everything? When? How?"

She was doing her best to convey the impression that it didn't matter.

"Everything—always—in New York—at Atlantic City—there especially! And lately—"

"Yes? Lately?"

"Lately—at Taplow."

"But at Taplow—how? In Heaven's name—how?"

"Oh, I was in and out of your room."

"So I understand; but what of that?"

"Nothing; nothing; only—only what I saw."

"Well, what did you see?"

Instead of answering this question at once she shifted her ground.

"If you cared—as you say—why didn't you tell some one?"

"Tell some one? Who could I tell?"

"Oh, any one. Lady Rideover, for one. She'd made a promise not to mention me; but you hadn't."

"But why should I have mentioned you when I never supposed she had any notion—"

"But you see that's it. If you'd cared—so much—you'd have done it—to one of your sisters or the other. But you didn't—not to either; and so they got the idea—"

"Yes? What idea did they get? Go on. Tell me."

I noticed that she was twisting and untwisting her fingers, and that she had begun throwing me quick, nervous glances through the half-light.

"It's no use telling you, because it doesn't matter. That is, it doesn't matter now. Everything's—arranged."

"We'll talk about that later. I want to know what idea Mabel and Evelyn got."

"They didn't get it exactly. They were only beginning to get it when I made them understand that I was going

back to be— Oh, why do you make me talk about it? Why do you bring it all up now, when it can't do any good?"

To get at the facts I was obliged to speak with the severity one uses toward a difficult child.

"I want you to tell me what idea Mabel and Evelyn got."

"Isn't it perfectly evident what idea they'd get? Any one would get it when you—when you never said a word—not the least, little, confidential word—and you so ill!—and blind!—and to your own sisters!—and that Miss Farley there!"

I passed over the reference to Miss Farley because I couldn't see what it meant. I had enough to do in seizing the new suggestion that had come to me.

"They didn't think—they couldn't have thought—that there was nothing on my side."

"And everything on mine. That's precisely the inference they drew. Girls do go about, you know, giving people to understand that men—"

"But not girls like you."

"Yes, girls like me; or sufficiently like me. And so I had—in sheer self-respect—to let Lady Rideover see that there was nothing in it of the kind of thing she thought, and that I was actually going home to be—"

"But didn't she see? Didn't she know? Didn't everybody see? Didn't everybody know?"

In the two brief sentences that came out with something like a groan she threw tremendous emphasis on the first word.

"Nobody knew! Nobody saw!"

There was a similar emphasis on the penultimate word in my response.

"Did you ask them?"

She flashed back at me: "I did—almost. At times like that—if it's so—some one generally knows it from—from the person who's expecting to be brimming over with his secret." She laughed again, lightly, nervously. "But in this instance nobody did."

"You asked them?"

"Practically. I forgot everything I used to consider pride and—and I sounded them."

"You sounded whom?"

"Oh, the people who knew you best—and who knew me—Annette, Esther Coningsby, Ralph—any one to whom I thought you might have betrayed yourself by a word. But it was just as with Evelyn and Lady Rideover. You had practically not mentioned my name. Hilda Grace told me she tried to sound you—that Sunday at Rosyth."

"Well?"

"I'm only quoting her, mind you. She said she didn't get"—there was a repetition of that nervous laugh—"she said she didn't get—any satisfaction. And so—"

I tried to take a reasonable tone. "But how could I tell you or anybody else before I'd confessed to you who I was and where you'd first seen me?"

"Exactly. I quite understand that—now that you've said what you've said to-night. It's where the past makes us pay—"

"For what I used to be."

"Oh, you're not the only one," she declared, in a curious, offhand tone. "It's for what I used to be, too."

I found it difficult to follow her. "What you used to be? I don't understand you."

"You know about me—how I've been engaged to one man after another—and broken the engagements."

"Because you were trying to find the right one."

"It wasn't only that. I thought of myself; I didn't think of them. I let them offer me everything they had to give—and pretended to accept it—just to experiment—to play with—and now—now I'm—I'm caught!"

"Caught—in what way?"

She tossed her hands outward in a little, exasperated gesture.

"I can't do the same thing again. It wouldn't be right. It wouldn't be sane."

"The same thing? Do tell me what you mean."

"It's—it's one of the same men. I'm—I'm caught. It's what mother—and Elsie Coningsby—and other people who could talk to me plainly—told me would happen some day. I'm—I'm punished. And I can't do the same thing the second time."

It was still to escape from the yawning hell into which I felt myself going down that I said, stupidly, "Why can't you?"

"Because I can't. It's what I said just now. It wouldn't be sane. I've made a kind of history for myself. If I were to do the same thing again it wouldn't merely seem cruel, it would seem crazy."

"But if you don't care for him?"

"I do—in a way. He's been so good and kind and patient and everything! And even if I didn't care for him at all it would be just the same—after what I've let him think—the second time."

I could see her reasoning, if reasoning it was, though it was not the uppermost thought in my mind. As a matter of fact, I was repeating her statement as to "one

of the same men." Which one of them was it? There had been three—the one she didn't trust—the one she couldn't have lived with—and the one who was only very nice. It would make such a difference which one it proved to be that I was afraid to ask her.

I burst out, desperately: "Oh, but why did you—let him think it—the second time?"

"I don't know. It happened by degrees—by writing—in letters—and I didn't see how far I was going. It was a kind of reaction."

"Reaction from what?"

She looked at me wildly. "From you, I think. As far as I remember it became definite at Taplow."

"When you were actually seeing me every day?"

"That was the reason. It was seeing you so cheerful and full of jokes—and not missing—not missing any one—nor ever mentioning them—not to a soul. It just convinced me of what I'd been sure of before—ever since the time at Atlantic City—that you didn't—that you never had . . . And so when he suggested it in one of his letters—I don't know what made me!—but I didn't say it was impossible."

"What did you say?"

"I said, who knows?—or something like that. And then he cabled—but I didn't cable back—I only wrote—trying to say no—but not saying it decidedly enough. . . . And so it's gone on—he writing and cabling both—and I only writing, but letting him think—just little by little—and not seeing how far I was being swept along."

I wanted to be clear as to the facts.

"Then do I understand that you're engaged to him?"

"I told him I wouldn't be engaged again—that engagements for me had come to be grotesque. I said that if

we did it we'd—we'd just go somewhere and be married."

"If you did it? Then it's possible—"

"No; because he's expecting it. I've allowed him to expect it—just little by little, you understand—and not seeing how far I was letting myself in. . . . And now he's told some people who used to know about it when I was engaged to him before—and that binds me because it will get about—so that if I were to break it off with him the second time I should be a laughing-stock—and quite rightly."

"Oh, Regina, how could you?"

Taking no note of the fact that for the first time in my life I had called her Regina, she answered, simply: "I tell you I don't know. If I do know it was because I was so lonely—and I'm over twenty-six—and feel older still—and nobody seemed to care about me but him—and I couldn't bear the idea of going on and never marrying any one at all—which is what Elsie Coningsby said would happen to me—and what I'd been half wishing for myself—and yet half afraid of. . . . And you—"

"Yes? What about me?"

"There was a nurse at Taplow, that Miss Farley—"

"Miss Farley! Oh, good God!"

"Well, how did I know? She was very pretty."

"Could I see whether she was pretty or not?"

"And you were always joking with her and thanking her."

"Of course I thanked her. What else could I do?"

"You needn't have kissed her hand. I caught you doing that one day when I was tidying up in your room."

"Did you? Very likely. When a man is as helpless as I was his gratitude often becomes maudlin."

"I don't know that you need call it that. He simply falls in love with the pretty nurse who takes care of him. It was happening all the time in the hospitals. But for me—right there in your room—and shut out from everything—"

"But that wasn't my fault. If I'd known you were there—"

"It was your fault at Atlantic City—and afterward—when I'd let you see—far more than a girl should ever let any man see."

"But you know how impossible it was for me then—till I'd told you who I was."

"I know it now. I didn't know it before half an hour ago. And the time when you told me that—that thing—at Rosyth—I had no idea whether or not you meant . . . And when you blame me for not coming down-stairs quicker than I did—"

"I haven't blamed you, Regina."

"You can't imagine what it was to be all at sea not merely as to what you felt, but actually as to what you were—and had been. When you pulled the pearls out of your pocket—and said you were that man—"

There were two or three minutes during which she stood with face averted, and I had to give her time to regain her self-control.

"You see," she went on, her rich mezzo just noticeably tremulous—"you see, I'd always thought about him—a girl naturally would, finding him in her room like that—but I'd thought of him as . . . And I'd been thinking of you, too. I'd been thinking of you as the very opposite of him. He was so terrible—so gaunt—so stricken—I see just a little of him in you now, after all you've suffered. . . . But you—I don't know what it was you had

about you—your brother had it, too—I saw it again when I met him at Evelyn's in Montreal, something a little more than distinguished, something faithful and good."

"Those things are often hang-overs of inheritance that have no counterpart in the nature."

"Well, whatever it was I saw it—and all that year those two types had been before my mind. Then when I was told that there were not two—that there was only one—it was like asking me to understand that the earth had only one pole, and that the North and the South Poles were identical." She surprised me with the question, "Did you ever read *La Dame aux Camélias?*"

I said I had, wondering at the connection.

"Don't you remember how it begins with the exhumation of the body of that poor woman six months after she was buried?"

I recalled the fact.

"So that all through the rest of the book, when Marguerite Gautier is at the height of her triumphs, if you call them triumphs, you see her as she was first shown to you. Well— Oh, don't you understand? That's the way I had to see—I had to see you!"

I hung my head. "I understand perfectly, Regina—now."

"There's so much we're only beginning to understand now, both on your side and on mine."

"When it's almost too late—if it isn't quite."

Her manner, her voice, both of which had been a little piteous, took on a sudden energy.

"Oh, as to that, I've been thinking it over—I've had to think over so much—and I don't believe the word applies."

"Doesn't apply?" I asked, in astonishment. "Why

not—when it's as late as it is? It's just as if Fate had been making us a plaything."

"I don't believe that. Life can't be the sport of disorganized chance. If Romeo takes poison ten minutes before Juliet wakes it's because the years behind them led up to the mistake."

"You mean that we reap only what we sow?"

"And that life is as much a matter of development in a logical sequence as the growth of certain plants from certain seeds. It isn't—it can't be—a mere frenzy of haphazards. Things happen to us in a certain way because what we've done leaves them no other way."

"And was there no other way in which this could happen to you and me?"

"Think! Isn't it the very outcome that might have been expected from what we've been in the past?"

I stared at her without comprehension.

"Because of your past life," she went on, "there was something you couldn't tell me; and because I didn't know it I've taken a step which my past life doesn't allow me to retrace. Could anything be neater?"

"And yet you're fond of saying that the way things happen is the best way."

"It's the best way if it's the only way, isn't it? I should go mad if I thought that my life hung on nothing but caprice—whether of luck or fate or anything you call God. I can stand my deserts, however hard, if I know they're my deserts."

"You can stand this?"

"This is not a question of standing; it's one of working out. Life isn't static; it's dynamic—those are the right words, aren't they? It's always unfolding. One thing leads to the next thing; and then there must be times

when a lot of things that seemed separate are gathered up in one immense result. Don't you think it must be that way?"

I said, stupidly, that I didn't know.

"Of course you don't know if you don't think; but try to think!"

"What good will thinking do when we see how things are?"

"It 'll show us how to make the best of them, won't it?"

"Is there any best to be made of your marrying anybody else than me? The way things happen isn't necessarily the best way."

After her hesitating syncopated sentences in dealing with what was more directly personal to her life and mine she talked now not so much calmly as surely, as of subjects she had long thought out.

"I don't say the best way absolutely; but the best in view of what we've made for ourselves. For ourselves you and I have made things hard. There's no question about that. But isn't it for both of us now to live this minute so that the next won't be any harder?"

There was no argument in this; there was only appeal.

"What," I asked, "do you mean by that?"

"I suppose I mean that the best way to live this minute is to accept what it contains—till it develops into something else—as it will. This isn't final. It's only a step on the way to—"

"It's a step on the way to your marrying a man you're not in love with, and my not marrying at all."

"And as the world is at present, aren't there worse tragedies than that?"

Irony of which she must have been unaware pricked

my dreams of celibate consecration to a cause as a pin pricks a bubble.

"So that if I stand still and let you go on—"

She threw me a quick glance. "And aren't you going to?"

The answer to that question was what in the back of my mind I had been trying to work out.

"Wouldn't it depend," I said, picking the right words, "on which of the three it is? There's one I couldn't interfere with—not without disregarding gratitude and honor."

"Do you want me to tell you which?"

But I didn't—not then. Too much hung on what the knowledge would bring me. There were decisions to which I couldn't force myself at once. In saying this I added, "But though I can't interfere with him without disregarding gratitude and honor, I don't say that I sha'n't disregard them."

In the clear starlight her eyes had a veiled metallic brightness.

"No?"

"And if I don't," I persisted, "what shall you do?"

"What would you expect me to do?"

"I should expect you to back me up."

"So that we should both be disregarding gratitude and honor?"

"We've a right to our happiness."

"That's a very old argument, isn't it?"

"It's not the less true for being old."

"Oh no; if it's true it's true—anyhow."

"And it is true. Don't you know it is?"

She surprised me by saying, as if quite casually, "I don't suppose that in the end it's the truth or the untruth of the argument that would weigh with me."

My heart gave a thump.

"Then what would weigh with you?"

She was standing with her back to the rail, the great white star behind her. As if to emphasize the minute of suspense the engines gradually stopped, while the ship rocked gently on the tide. The lights on shore were more complex now, lights above lights, lights back of lights, with the profusion of seaboard towns even in November. The murmur of voices and the click of heels grew expectant as well as joyous.

When she spoke at last it was with breast heaving and eyes downcast. Her words came out staccatowise, as if each made its separate effort to keep itself back.

"What would weigh with me? I—I don't know."

"Does that mean," I demanded, sharply, "that you might back me up?"

I could barely catch her words.

"It means first of all that—that I'm awfully weak."

"It isn't weak, Regina, to—to love."

"It's weak for a soldier to make love an excuse for not fighting."

"But you're not a soldier."

"Oh yes, I am; and so are you. We're all soldiers now—every one in the world. We keep telling ourselves —we keep telling one another—that we're fighting for right. It's our great justification. But what's the use of fighting for public right if we go and do wrong privately?"

"But it isn't right for you to throw yourself away on a man you don't care for."

"It's right for me to stand by my word—what is practically my word—till something relieves me from the necessity."

"And do you think anything ever will?"

"That's not what I have to consider. If I do what I know I ought to do I've only to wait—and let the next thing come."

"And what you know you ought to do—are you going to do it?"

She looked up at me pleadingly, quiveringly, with clasped hands.

"I don't want to do—to do anything else. Oh, Frank, I hope you won't make me!"

It was not this unexpected collapse that made me tremble; it was not this confession; it was the knowledge that I had her in my power. She had seemed so far above me—ever since I knew her; she had seemed so far beyond me, so strong, so aloof, so ice pure, so inflexibly and inaccessibly right! And now she was ready to come to me if I insisted on taking her.

But the hungry beast in me was not yet satisfied with her avowals.

"Could I, Regina—could I—make you?"

I once saw in the eyes of a spaniel that knew it was going to be shot the beseeching, submissive, helpless look I saw here.

"You know what I've been doing, Frank—the last two years—just to be where I—where I could—hear about you—occasionally—and see you perhaps—when you couldn't see me."

I bent down toward her, close, closer, till I almost enveloped her.

"Yes, I know that—now—and—and I'm—I'm going to make you."

She didn't answer, but she didn't withdraw. Perhaps she crept nearer me. Certainly she shivered.

The look in her eyes was still helpless, submissive, beseeching; but because it grew mortally frightened as well I repeated what I had said as softly but as firmly as I could make the words:

"I'm—I'm going to make you."

There was nothing but the strip of black veiling between her lips and mine when a sudden flash that might have come out of heaven threw me back with a start.

It was there above us—the great beacon—landlike—homelike—the New World—the new work—the new problems to be solved—the new duties toward mankind to be hammered home—while thankful voices were murmuring round us:

"Sandy Hook!"

CHAPTER XXIV

I NEVER knew the compulsion exercised by organized life till I found it settling round me, with an even distribution like that of the weight of the atmosphere on the body, paralyzing my will and making it impotent. No more than I could throw off the atmosphere could I be free from this force for a second.

It began with my arrival on the dock, where Sterling Barry had come to meet his daughter. I had seen him often enough before, though I had never known him otherwise than in the way called touch-and-go. A ruddy, portly, handsome fellow of sixty-odd, with eyes that had passed on their torch to his daughter's, he must in early life have been retiring and diffident, for his general approach now had that forced jovial note that verges on the boisterous.

"Hello! Hello!" he cried, as he lilted up to where I stood with Lovey in the Custom House Section M. "Alive and kicking, what? Couldn't kill you. Tried, didn't they?" he went on, looking me over. "Not but what it might have been worse, of course. Billy Townsend's son 'll never come back at all, poor chap. Fine young fellow, with a bee in his bonnet about aviation. Would go—and now you see! Well, we've got you back and we're going to keep you. What do you know about that?"

I replied that as things were I was afraid I had no choice but to stay.

"And if you want a job come to me. Some big things doing. Country never so prosperous. Lots of business for every one—even for poor old nuts like us. Well, so long! Come and see us. Mrs. Barry will want to hear you talk. Awfully keen on the war, she is, and that sort of thing. Bit down in the mouth now over this Rumania business. Sad slump that, very."

I said that it only left the more for us to do.

"Got your hands full, what? They do seem to put it over on you, don't they? Ah, well, we won't see you licked. We'll keep out of the war as war; but you've got our sympathy. Watchful waiting—that's the new ticket, you know. Can do a lot with that."

With his light, dancing step he was waltzing away again when he suddenly returned.

"Mrs. Barry 'll have something to tell you," he said, with a gleam in his eye curiously like that in Regina's. "Perhaps you know it already. Regina may have given you the tip, what? People get confidential on board ship. Nothing else to do. No fuss and feathers about it. They don't want that. War-time spirit, you know. Just telling a few of our friends. Don't mind saying that Mrs. Barry and I are mighty delighted. Been like our own son for years. Sorry when it came to nothing last time; but look at 'em now!" He pointed to Section B, where Cantyre was bending over Regina as I had bent over her last night. "Can see from here what it means. Get your congratulations by and by."

Of all this the point is that I couldn't say a word. I couldn't tell him there on the dock that I didn't mean to let it go any farther, nor did he suspect for a second that

I had more than an outsider's interest in the romance. I felt awkward and cowardly at remaining dumb, but neither time nor place admitted of a protest.

So, too, when a few minutes later Cantyre came over to give me his welcome. It was the welcome of old, with a shocked pity in it.

"Didn't expect to see you so badly mauled," was his sorrowful comment after the first demonstrations. "I knew you were wounded, of course, and that you had been blind. Regina wrote me that from Taplow. But I didn't look for your being so—"

"Oh, it's nothing," I interposed, in the effort to shut off his sympathy.

Having asked me a few professional questions in reference to the ways in which I had been wounded, he said: "Well, now that we've got hold of you again we mean to feed you up and take care of you. You're going to be my patient, Frank. For the present, at any rate, we'll be living in the same old house, and I shall be able to keep a daily eye on you. Lovey here has your apartment as clean as an operating-room. See you there later. Just now I've got to go back to—to Regina. And by the way"—his habitually mournful expression brightened as a lowering day lights up when the sun bursts through the masses of drifting cloud—"by the way, I shall have something to tell you by and by. The most wonderful thing has happened, Frank—something you and I used to talk about before you went abroad."

He wrung my hand with that way he had of pulling it downward and pulling it hard, which betrayed all sorts of raptures breaking in on a spirit that had never known common, every-day happiness. His whole face asked me

to rejoice with him, and, though I couldn't do that, I couldn't do the other thing.

It was on my lips to say, "You can't have her because I'm going to take her away from you." But the words died before they were formed. The very thought died in my mind. Whatever I did, I shouldn't be able to do it that way; and so I let him go.

"Do you know what he meant, Slim—when he said them things—the doctor?"

This was Lovey's question as he sat beside me in the taxicab and we drove up-town.

As I made no answer, he mumbled, mysteriously: "I do. I 'aven't valeted 'im for nothink."

I still made no answer, and the mumble ceased.

As yet I had noticed him only as the returned traveler notices the faithful old dog that greets him by lifting his eyes adoringly and wagging his tail. I saw now that the intervening two and a half years had aged him. He had grown white and waxy; his thin gray hair was thinner. A trembling, like that of a delicately poised leaf on a day when there is little wind, shook his hands, and the left corner of his lower lip had the pathetic quiver of a child's when it is about to sag in a great weeping.

As I had paid him so little attention on the dock, I picked up the hand resting on his knee and pressed it.

He responded with a long, harsh breath which, starting as a sigh of comfort, became something inarticulately emotional.

"Oh, Slim! I've got ye back, 'aven't I?"

"Seems like it, Lovey." I laughed without feeling mirthful.

"Ye look awful, don't ye?"

"I suppose I do."

"But it don't make no difference to me, it don't. I'd rather 'ave ye all chawed up like this than not 'ave ye at all."

"Thank you, Lovey."

"Them wars is awful things. Why don't they stop 'em?" He continued, without waiting for an explanation: "It's all along o' them blamed Germans. The cheek o' them—to go and fight Englishmen! There was a German in the 'at-shop in the Edgeware Road used to 'ang round me somethin' fierce; and now I believe he wasn't nothink but a-spyin' on me. Don't you think he was, Slim?"

"I think very likely."

"Makes my blood run cold, it does, the times I've took 'im into a little tea-shop in Great Hatfield Street—and me a-treatin' on 'im, like. If I 'adn't 'ad luck I might be lookin' like you by this time. Ain't it awful to be one-eyed, sonny?"

"Oh, I'm getting used to it."

"Used to it till you looks in the glass, I expect. Get a fright when ye do that, don't you? But it's all right, Slim. It wouldn't matter to me if you was a worse looker than y'are. I wouldn't turn ye down, neither, not if it was for all the doctors in the world. Not but what he's been very attentive to me while you was away. I don't make no complaint about that. Bit finicky about socks and 'andkerchiefs always the same color—and ye couldn't see 'is socks most o' the time—only when he pulled up his trouser leg apurpose—but a good spender and not pokin' 'is nose into my affairs. I'll say all that for 'im; but if he was to ask my 'and in marriage, like, and I could get you, Slim—all bunged up as y'are now and everything!—well, I know what I'd say."

Too miserable to reject this bit of sympathy, I said, merely, "Unfortunately, Lovey, every one may not be of your opinion."

"I d'n' know about that," he protested. "Seems to me everybody would be if you could make 'em understand, like."

There was nothing offensive in this, coming as it did from a deep affection, but, as it had gone far enough, I turned my attention to the streets.

There was a quality in them not to be apprehended by the sense of sight. It defied at first my limited powers of analysis. Something to which I was accustomed was not there; and something was there to which I was not accustomed.

That to which I was not accustomed struck me soon as shimmering, shining, radiant. That it was not an outward radiance goes without saying. New York on that November day was as dreary and bleak a port as one could easily land at. A leaden sky cloaked the streets in a leaden, lifeless atmosphere. The tops of steeples and the roofs of the tall buildings were wreathed in a leaden mist. Patches of befouled snow on the ground, with the drifts of paper, rags, and refuse to which the New York eye is so inured that it doesn't see them, lent to the side-streets through which we clattered an air of being so hopelessly sunk in dirt that it is no use trying to be any other way. Drays rumbled, motor-trucks honked, ferry-boats shrieked, tram-cars clanked, trains overhead crashed with a noise like that of the shell that had struck the *Assiniboia*, while our taxicab creaked and squeaked and spluttered like an old man putting on a speed he has long outlived. On the pavements a strange, strange motley of men and women—Hebrew, Slavic, Mongolian, negro, negroid—

carried on trades as outlandish as themselves. Here and there an outlandish child shivered its way to an outlandish school. Only now and then one saw a Caucasian face, either clean, alert, superior, or brutalized and repulsive beyond anything to be seen among the yearning, industrious aliens.

And yet to me all was lit by an inner light of which I couldn't at first see the lamp. I caught the rays without detecting the source that emitted them. In and through and above this squalid New York, with its tumult, its filth, its seeming indifference to the individual, there was a celestial property born of the kingdom of heaven. It shone in the sky; it quivered in the air; it lay restfully on the hoary graveyards nestling at the feet of prodigious cubes, like eld at the base of Time. All faces glowed with it; all tasks translated it; all the clamor of feet and wheels and whistles sang it like a song.

The name of it came to me with a cry of joy and a pang of grief simultaneously. It was peace. I was in a country that was not at war.

I had forgotten the experience. I had forgotten the sensation it produces. I had forgotten that there was a world in which men and women were free to go and come without let or hindrance. And here were people doing it. The day's work claimed them, and nothing beyond the day's work. To earn a living was an end in itself. The living earned, a man could enjoy it. The money he made he could spend; the house he built he could occupy; the motor he bought he could ride in; the wife he married he could abide with; the children he begot he could bring up. He could go on in this routine till he sickened and died and was buried in it. There was no terrific overruling

motive to which all other motives had become subsidiary, and into which they merged.

In the countries I had been living in war was the sky overhead and the ground beneath the feet. One dreamed it at night, and one woke to it in the morning. It made everything its adjunct, every one its slave. Duty, wealth, love, devotion, had no other object on which to pour themselves out. It commanded, absorbed, monopolized. There was no home it didn't visit, no pocket it didn't rifle, no face it didn't haunt, no heart it didn't search and sift and strengthen and wrench upward—the process was always a hard, dragging, compulsive one—till the most wilful had become submissive and the most selfish had given all. Prayer was war; worship was war; art, science, philosophy, sport were war. Nothing else walked in the streets or labored in the fields or bought and sold in the shops. It was the next Universal after God.

And here, after God, a man was his own Universal. With no standard to which everything had to be referred he seemed unutterably care-free. Care-free was not a term I should have used of New York, of America, in the old days; but it was now the only one that applied. The people I saw going by on the sidewalks had nothing but themselves and their families to think of. Their only struggle was the struggle for food and shelter. Safe people, happy people, dwelling in an Eden out of the reach of cannon and gas and bomb!

"I came not to bring peace, but a sword!"

Sacrilegiously, perhaps, I was applying those words to myself as we jolted homeward. But I was applying them with a query. I was asking if it could possibly be worth while. All at once my mission became unreal, fantastic.

To begin with, it was beyond my powers. Among these hundreds of thousands of strangers I knew but a handful. Even on that handful I should make no impression. I could see at a glance, from the few words I had exchanged with people on the dock, that each man's cup was full. You couldn't pour another drop into it. I had subconsciously taken it for granted that my friends would be, as it were, waiting for me; and already it was evident that in their minds there would not be a vacant spot. I had not the will-power to force myself in on so much hurry and preoccupation.

Then I wasn't interested in it any more. I had pretentiously thought of myself as dedicated to a cause, and now the cause had dissolved into nothing on this leaden, overcharged air. It would be ridiculous to wean these people away from their work, even if I could play like the Pied Piper and have them follow me. I didn't want to do it. I wanted to marry the woman I loved, and settle down quietly, industriously, to spend my days in an office and my nights at home, like the countless human ants that were running to and fro. My celibacy of the will was gone. My consecration was gone. Where these austerities had been there was now only that yearning of whatever it is that draws a man toward a woman, and I asked nothing but the freedom to enjoy. I was determined to enjoy. The resolve came over me with this first glimpse of New York. It came over me in a tide of desire which was all the fiercer for its long repression. It may have been the demand of the flesh for compensation. That which had not merely been denied, but brutalized and broken, rose with the appetite of a starving beast.

So, thirdly, I was not fit for any high undertaking. It was not my real self that had made these vows; it was

a phantasm self evoked by the vast emotions of a strife in which the passions raged on a scale that lifted the human temporarily out of itself. But now that the strife had been left behind, the human fell back into the same old rut.

In the same old rut I found myself. I had reverted to what I had been before there was a war at all. My carnal instincts were as strong as ever; as strong as ever was my longing for Regina Barry as my wife. It was stronger than ever, since I meant to get her by hook or by crook, if I couldn't do it by the methods which colloquially we call straight.

It was, however, the difficulties of hook and crook that oppressed me. The straight line was in this case that of least resistance. I grew more convinced of it as the day advanced.

There was everything to make my return to the old quarters a moment of depression. The quarters themselves, which had seemed palatial after the Down and Out, were modest to the point of being squalid. As Cantyre had said, Lovey had kept them as clean as an operating-room, but cleanliness couldn't relieve their dingy shabbiness or make up for the absence of daylight.

Moreover, Cantyre's own proximity was trying to me. There was only the elbow of a corridor between his rooms and mine. He would resume the old chumming habits of running in and out, while I was sharpening a knife to stab him in the back.

And in the processes of unpacking Lovey got on my nerves. He got on my nerves as a sweet, old, fussy mother gets on those of a wayward son during the hours he is compelled to stay at home. Dogging me about from one room to another, his affection was like a draught

of milk held out to a man whose lips are parched for brandy.

It was a relief, therefore, when the telephone rang and Annette van Elstine asked me to come and have tea with her. I knew that Annette was not craving to see me merely as her cousin; and as my cousin I could have waited patiently for the pleasure of seeing her; but with her scent for drama and her insatiable curiosity she would raise the issues of which I wanted to talk even if I got no good from it.

I found her as little changed as if Time had not passed nor War dropped his bomb on the world.

Annette's smartness, as I have already told you, was difficult to define. It was not in looks or dress or manner of living or gifts of intellect. If I could ascribe it to a cause I should put it down as authority of position combined with the possession of a great many personal secrets. She knew your intimate history for the reason that she asked you intimate questions. Authority of position enabled her to do this—or at least she acted as if it did—with the right of a cross-examiner to probe the truth in court. She could convey the impression that her interest in your affairs was an honor—as if a queen were to put her royal finger in your family pie—so that quite artlessly you unlocked your heart to her. Other people's unlocked hearts were her kingdom, since, as far as I could see, she had nothing in her own.

Also, as far as I could see, she wore the same tea-gown I had always seen her in; she sat in the same chair in front of the same fire; she had before her the same tea equipage; she might have been pouring the same tea.

The transition from the necessary questions as to my personal experiences and wounds to that of the exact

relations between Mrs. Hartlepool and Gen. Lord Birkenhead was an easy one. Disappointed that I had spent two years at the front and had heard nothing of the delicate situation between these distinguished persons, of which an amazing mass of contradictory detail had reached certain circles in New York, she turned the conversation on what was really the matter in hand.

"So you came over on the same boat as Regina?"

Unable to deny this statement, I admitted its truth. The dusky ripples played over Annette's round features, giving them a somber vivacity.

"Did she tell you anything?"

"Yes; a good many things."

"Anything special, I mean?"

"Everything she said was special, as far as I can remember."

She tried another avenue.

"You've gone back to your old quarters, haven't you?"

"Yes; I kept them all the time I was away. Stupid, I suppose; but when I left New York I didn't expect to be gone for more than a few weeks."

"Stephen Cantyre is in that house, isn't he?"

"On the same floor with me."

"You'll see a great deal of him, won't you?"

"I did when I was there before."

"Was he on the dock to meet Regina?"

"He was on the dock, either to meet her or to meet me. As a matter of fact, he met us both."

"Did he say anything about her?"

"Yes; he said he had to go and speak to her."

"Only to speak to her?"

"What more could he do—right there on the dock?"

"Oh, then you do know?"

"Know what?"

"What do you suppose? Can't you guess?"

"I didn't know you wanted me to guess. I thought you meant to tell me."

"I can't tell you what I don't know myself—officially."

"Do you know it in any other way?"

"I know it by signs and tokens."

"One can infer a lot from them."

"That's just what I've done. It wasn't till I heard that you'd come over in the same boat with her—"

The rest of the sentence was conveyed by a look which invited me to go on.

"You thought I might be able to corroborate the signs and tokens?"

"Or contradict them—if it's not a rude thing to say."

I wriggled away from the frontal attack. "Why should it be rude?"

"Oh, well, I'm the last person in the world to go poking into other people's business."

"Exactly."

"Only people do like to tell me things."

"I can quite understand that—when they've anything to tell."

"Which is what I thought you might have."

"How could I have anything to tell when I've just spent two years in trenches and hospitals?"

"You haven't been in trenches and hospitals during the last ten days. Oh, don't say anything if you don't want to. I'm not in the least curious."

"Of course you're not. No one would ever think so."

"I've only been—well, just a little afraid."

"What were you afraid of?"

"Of the situation. I suppose it wasn't an accident that you took the boat that she was on?"

"No, it wasn't an accident. But what has that to do with it?"

"Just that much—that you did it on purpose."

"So that you were afraid on my account?"

"No; on hers. You see, she's been so terribly talked about that now that it's beginning again—"

"Oh, it's beginning again, is it?"

She said, mysteriously, "Stephen Cantyre is rather a goose, you know."

"In what way?"

"In the way of dropping hints when he'd much better keep still. He's so crazy about her—"

"It's a pity for him to be dropping hints if he isn't sure."

"Oh, he must be sure enough! After the way she treated him before, he'd never expose himself to the same thing the second time. It isn't that he's not sure. It's just the way he does it—confiding in every one, but only saying that he hopes."

"If he only hopes, it doesn't bind any one but himself."

"It isn't a question of binding; it's one of the situation. If she's let him hope—the second time—she's bound. If it was only the first time—or if she hadn't made such an insane reputation for herself—don't you see?—the whole thing is in that."

"I should think the whole thing was in whether or not she was in love with him."

"Well, it isn't. If she was as much in love with somebody else as Juliet she couldn't throw over Stephen Cantyre now. She'd have to be put under restraint if she did—shut up in some sort of ward. The community wouldn't stand for it."

"It might be a nine days' wonder, of course."

"It would be one of those nine days' wonders that last all your life. She'd be done for." She went on in another key. "But, of course, her father and mother wouldn't let her. They're delighted. He's very well off—and a good fellow, who'll give her everything she wants."

"But what good will that do if she doesn't care for him?"

Her animation went into the eclipse that always came over her when she touched the heart of things.

"What makes you think she doesn't—if it's not a rude question?"

"The fact that she turned him down before."

She broke in with that directness which she never hesitated to make use of when the time came.

"You don't think she cares anything about you?"

I considered two or three ways of meeting this, the one I adopted being to put on a rather inane smile.

"What if she did?"

"She'd just have to get over it, that's all. You, too!"

"Why?"

"I needn't tell you why. You must see for yourself. Or, rather, I've told you already. There are ways in which an engagement is more important than a marriage —any engagement; and when it's a second engagement to the same man— If she'd been married to him, and couldn't get along, why, no one would think the worse of her if she got a divorce and married some one else. She would have given him a try; she would have done her best. But just to take him up and put him down, and take him up and put him down again, without trying him at all—my dear Frank, it isn't done!"

"But suppose we did it?"

"In that case it might be the world well lost for love—but the world would be lost; and you needn't be under any misconception about it. Personally I'd stand by any one through almost anything; I have stood by Regina in the past when lots of other women have given her the cold shoulder because of her—"

Call it anything you like. Most of us have other names for it. All I want to say now is that I wouldn't stand by her in this; nor by you, either. If you had come to me when you were in your other troubles—three or four years ago—you'd have found me just the same as if you'd been keeping straight. Any one can go to the bad. There isn't a family that hasn't some one who's done it. But this would be the kind of thing— Frank, old boy, I'm telling you right now, so that you'll know where you stand with me. I'd have to be the first to cut you both."

To this there were several retorts I could have made, any of them quite crushing to Annette; but I was thinking of the practical difficulties before us. The rôle of unscrupulous coquette was the last in which Regina would care to appear; that of cad was equally distasteful to me. Had it been possible to make one plunge and be over with it, it would have been different; as it was, the preliminaries—the facing of all the people who would have to be faced—the explaining all the things that would have to be explained—couldn't but be devilish.

I was just beginning, "Why should you assume that we are thinking of any such thing—?"

But before I could finish the sentence the door opened gently and a maid's voice announced, "Mrs. Barry."

Of all the people in the world, this lady was the last I wanted to meet at that moment. Knowing how I

must have figured in her eyes in the past, I was planning for the future to figure in a worse light still. I had thrown her kindness back in her face and never given her an explanation. She must have known that my seeming flight from Long Island after that last Sunday in June, 1914, had left her daughter unhappy; and the reason had remained a mystery.

She gave me the first glance as she entered, and only the second to our hostess. The awful severity of those who are temperamentally gentle and unjudging was in the very coldness of her eye.

She was a charming, delicate, semi-invalid woman who seemed to have been spun, like the clothes she wore, out of the least durable materials in life. Regina had the same traits, but harder, stronger, and more lasting. It was difficult to think of the latter as an invalid; while you couldn't see the mother as anything else.

Prettily old-fashioned, she seemed not to have changed her style of dressing since the eighteen-seventies. The small bonnet might have dated from the epoch of professional beauties when Mrs. Langtry was a girl. The long fur pelisse with loose hanging sleeves was of no period at all. I think she wore a train. In her own house she habitually did, and she seemed to have just flung on the pelisse and driven down the Avenue in her motor.

She greeted me politely, without enthusiasm, but with due regard to the fact that I was a wounded hero home from the wars. Talking of the invasion of Rumania, she showed herself much more alive to America's international duty than any of the few men I had met since my landing.

"I wish we could get my husband and Stephen to see things that way," she continued, sweetly, over her tea-

cup. "They're so pacifist, both of them. My husband feels that we've nothing to do with it, and Stephen is opposed to war on any ground. You must talk to him, Mr.—or captain, isn't it? Oh, major? You must talk to him, Major Melbury. He'll listen to you." She turned to Annette. "You know, Annette, I just ran in to share our good news with you. Regina and Stephen—they've made it up again—and they're so happy!" An oblique glance included me. She was getting the satisfaction that women receive from a certain kind of revenge. "Poor darling! You don't know how hard she's tried, Annette. People haven't understood her. All she's wanted was to be sure of herself—and now she is. She's really been in love with Stephen all these years, only she didn't know it. That is, she knew it; and yet— But I'm sure you see it. You're one of the few who've never been unkind to her. She wanted me to tell you. She'll be so glad to have you know it, too, Major Melbury. Perhaps she told you on the boat. I think she said she did. I don't quite remember. There's been so much to say in the last few hours. There always is at such a time, don't you think? . . . No; they're not going to announce an engagement. It would only make more talk, after all the talk there's been. One of these days they'll be married—without saying anything about it. And, oh!—I know you'll be interested, Annette, though it may bore Major Melbury—Stephen has bought that very nice house—the Endsleigh Jarrotts lived in it for a little while—on Park Avenue near Sixty-sixth Street. Ralph Conings by is going to remodel it for them, and I'm sure it will be awfully attractive. That's where they'll live."

It was my opportunity. I could have shouted out there and then and made a scene.

Do you think me a coward for not doing it? Do you think me a fool?

All kinds of speeches were hot within me—and I kept them back. More correctly, I didn't keep them back; I simply couldn't utter them. I couldn't give pain to this sweet lady sipping her tea so contentedly; I couldn't give pain to Annette. Annette was enjoying the situation in which we found ourselves; the sweet lady had got compensation for months, for years, of wondering and unhappiness in those seemingly artless words, "She's really been in love with Stephen all these years, only she didn't know it." I knew they were spoken for my benefit. Between the lines, between the syllables, they said, "And if you think she was ever in love with you you're wrong." Whether the sweet lady believed her own statements or not made little difference. It would gratify her all her life to remember that she had had the chance of making them.

So I came away, following the line of least resistance, because I didn't see what else I could do.

I didn't see what else I could do when Cantyre came into my bedroom late that night.

I knew he would be dining at the Barrys', and that he would come looking me up after his return. To avoid him I had the choice between staying out and going to bed. My physical condition kept me from staying out very late, and so I took the other alternative. It made no difference, however, since he waked Lovey by pounding on the door, and insisted on coming in.

Dropping into the arm-chair beside my bed, with no light but that which streamed in behind him from the sitting-room, he took me on my weak side by beginning to talk about the war.

I have said that my mission had become unreal and fantastic, but that was only in relation to my personal fitness for the task. That the war was a holy war, to be fought to a holy end, remained the alpha and omega of my convictions. And to Cantyre war of any kind was plainly unholy war, productive of unholy reactions. What I felt as he talked may best be expressed by Lovey's words next morning when he betrayed the fact that he had been listening.

"Didn't it get yer goat, Slim, the way the doctor went on last night?"

It did get my goat, and I restrained myself only because I had been warned in London to be patient with Americans. "You must treat them as wise parents treat their sons," I had been told. "Help them to see for themselves —and when they do that you can trust them." So the best I could do was to help Cantyre to see for himself; and to make any headway in that I had to pretend to be tolerant.

"No one contends that war is the ideal method for settling human difficulties," I admitted; "but as long as human society stands on certain planks in its platform there'll be no other way."

"Then isn't this the time to take another way?"

"No; because you've got to change your bases of existence first. You can't change your effects without first changing your causes, any more than you can graft an apple on an oak."

"But even without removing the cause you can still sometimes nip the effect."

"Which is what in the present instance we tried to do, and didn't succeed in. All the trend of education during thirty years has been in the direction of eliminat-

ing war, while still keeping the principles that make for war as part of the foundation of our life. We created a system of international law; we set up a Hague Tribunal; many of us had come to the conclusion that no great war could ever again take place; but the law by which human beings prefer as yet to live outwitted us and brought war upon us whether we would or not. So long as you keep the causes you must have the effects."

"Then let us do away with the causes."

"Yes! Let us. Only, to do that in time for the present situation we should have begun five hundred years ago. You can't put out the fire the ages have kindled as you'd blow out a candle. When you've spent centuries in preparing your mine, and fixed a time fuse to make it explode, you've nothing to do but to let it go off. This war wasn't made overnight. The world has been getting ready for it as long as there have been human beings to look askance at one another. Now we've got it—with all its horrors, but also with all its compensations."

"Compensations for the lives it has ruined?"

"In the lives it has saved—yes. You'll never get its meaning unless you see it as a great regenerative process."

"Do you mean to tell me that we can only be regenerated by fire and sword and rapine?"

"Not at all! We're regenerated by courage and honor and sacrifice and the sense that every man gets—every Tommy, every poilu, every bluejacket—that he personally is essential to man's big fight in his struggle upward. It's one of the queer things of the whole business that out of the greatest wrong human beings can inflict on one another—to go to war with them—there can come the highest benefits to every individual who gets himself ready to receive them. It makes one believe in an intelligence

compelling the race toward good, however much we may be determined to go the other way."

He tuned his voice to a new key.

"Oh, I've never doubted that; and now, old chap, now I—I see it."

I knew what was coming. It was the great subject that could eclipse even that of the war. I had just force to pull the bedclothes up about my mouth and mutter a suffocated, "How?"

"What I hinted this morning. It's all—it's all come right. I used to think it never would, sometimes. And then—don't laugh, old boy!—but then I'd say to myself that God would never have made me feel as I did unless He meant something to come of it. Religion keeps telling you to trust; and I did trust—on and off."

Again I had an opportunity; but again such words as rose in me choked themselves back in my throat. I could have told him that she was ready to come to me if I lifted a finger. I knew I should have to tell him sometime, and it occurred to me that it might as well be now. It was the words that failed me, not the intention; or if it was the intention, it was the intention in any degree that made it compulsory.

I don't think he noticed that I said nothing, for he went falteringly on:

"It's a wonderful thing to be happy, Frank. I've never been happy before in my life. I'm a pusillanimous sort of bloke, and there's the truth. I wasn't happy at home, or at school, or at college, or in any of the hospitals where I worked; and I never made any friends. You must know I've been queer when I say that women have always looked at me as if I was outside of their range. They've never made up to me in the way they

do to most fellows with a bit of money and not deformed. Regina—there! I've said her name—she was the very first who ever took the trouble to be more than just decently civil."

I managed to stammer the words, "What did she do?"

"Oh, nothing very much—not at first. She seemed to think—she used to say it—that I was different from most men. That's what she appeared to be on the look-out for. All the other chaps she knew were so much alike, and I— Well, that's how it began. She wanted the unusual—and I turned up. After a while she thought I wasn't unusual enough—said it in so many words— But you know that story. I've told you too many times already."

"And now?"

"She thinks she'll marry me."

He brought out the statement in a voice all awe and amazement.

"She only thinks?"

"Oh, she will. She wouldn't say anything about it if she didn't mean—"

"And—and you're going to—to let her?"

"Let her? Why, man, you might as well ask me if I'd let God forgive my sins if He said He'd do it."

"God could forgive your sins and not be any the worse off Himself."

He sprang forward in his chair, grabbing at the bed-clothes.

"Frank, I swear to you it will be the same with her. She'll never be sorry. I'll never let her. She'll be like God to me. I'll make my whole life worship and service."

"If that's what she wants."

"It's what every woman wants, so they say. They

just ask to be loved; and when you love them enough—" He uttered a little shrill laugh, in which there was a touch of the hysterical that was always somewhere about him. "God! Frank, it's wonderful! Even you who know her can't imagine what it means to a lonely bloke like me."

I pumped myself up to a great effort.

"Suppose"—I had to moisten my lips before going on —"suppose she was to play you the same trick she played you before?"

"She wouldn't."

In spite of his evident conviction, I pressed the question.

"But if she did?"

He threw off in a tone that seemed careless: "In that case there'd be just one thing for me to do. I'd leave her everything I possess—I'm doing that as it is—and, well, you can guess the rest. I—I couldn't go through all that again. The first time—well, I just pulled it off; but the second—"

It was the old story. They all seemed to have the second time on the brain. I, too, was getting it on the brain. It was like a trip-hammer pounding in my head.

I forced myself, however, to make some foolish, semi-jovial speech in which there was no congratulation, begging him, then, for the love of Heaven, to clear out, as I wanted to go to sleep.

CHAPTER XXV

NO record of the next few weeks exists for me. I suppose I must have done things—little things. I must have gone in and out, and eaten my meals, and fulfilled Lovey's orders—for, lacking volition of my own, I was entirely at his command. But the recollection of it all has passed from me. I remember reading in some one's reminiscences of prison life that the weeks of solitary confinement went by; but the released prisoner could not say how. Nothing remained with him, apparently, but a big, black blur; and of these first weeks in New York it was all that stayed with me.

I know that Christmas came and went, and that I spent the festival at Atlantic City. I did this in a wild hope, which I knew was idiotic when I formed it. I told Lovey what I was about to do; I knew he, in the course of his valeting, which he still kept up, would tell Cantyre; I guessed that Cantyre would tell Regina; and I hoped—it never really amounted to hoping, I only dreamed—that Regina might find the moment a favorable one for slipping away and joining me. Then we should actually do the thing so impossible to plan.

But, of course, nothing came of it; and I returned to New York more unsatisfied than I had gone away. The sense of being unsatisfied sent me at last to Sterling Barry's door.

You will observe that I had not talked with Regina since our last night on board ship. On the morning of

landing her quick movements, as compared with my slow, lumbering ones, enabled her to elude me. Since our landing my will had been positively paralyzed. Those words of hers, "Oh, Frank, I hope you won't make me!" were always in my memory; but the very sense that I could use the power held me back from doing it. I meant to use it; but as each minute came round when I might have taken a step toward that end I seemed to fall backward, like the men who went out with swords and staves to take the Christ.

But two days after my return from Atlantic City I came to the conclusion that I could wait no longer. I could go and call on her at least. For the family it would mean no more than that I had come to offer my congratulations. For her—but I could tell that only by being face to face with her.

The old manservant recognized me on coming to the door. He was sorry that Miss Barry had gone to tea with Miss van Elstine, and was sure his mistress would be sorry, too. Moreover, they had all heard of my prowess in battle, and were proud of me.

So I drove round in my taxi to Annette's.

The maid would have ushered me straight up to the library, but I preferred to send in my card. As I was being conducted up-stairs a minute later I had the privilege of hearing a few words which I am sure Annette intended for my ear.

"Well, I don't mind this once, Regina; but I can't have it going on. . . . Yes, I know it's an accident; but it's an accident that mustn't continue to happen. The very fact that he's my cousin obliges me to be the more careful. It wouldn't be fair to your father and mother if I were to let you come here—"

"But, Annette, this once is all I'm asking for."

"And all I mean to grant."

I could tell by Annette's voice that she was retreating to another room, so that by the time I entered Regina stood there alone. Before I knew what I was doing I held both her hands in mine and was kissing them.

It is an odd fact that on raising my eyes I saw her features for the first time since that summer afternoon at Rosyth. On board ship she had always worn the yashmak; and on the dock she had been too far away to allow of my seeing more than that she was there.

The face I saw now was not like Annette's, untouched by the passage of time and suffering and world agony. You might have said that in its shadows and lines and intensities the whole history of the epoch was expressed. It was one of those twentieth-century faces—they are women's faces, as a rule—on which the heroic in our time has stamped itself in lineaments which neither paint nor marble could reproduce. It flashed on me that the transmigrated soul had traveled farther than I had suspected.

I don't know wnat we said to each other at first. They were no more than broken things, not to be set down by the pen. When I came to the consciousness of my actual words I was saying, "I'm going to make you, Regina; I'm going to make you."

She responded like a child who recognizes power, but has no questionings as to right and wrong.

"Are you, Frank? How?"

"In any way that suggests itself." I added, helplessly, "I don't know how."

"I'll do whatever you tell me," she said, simply and submissively.

"Then will you just walk away with me some afternoon—and be married—without saying anything to any one?"

"If you say so."

"When shall we do it?"

"Whenever you like."

"Next week?"

"If that suits you."

"Would it suit you?"

She bent her head and was silent. I repeated the question with more insistence.

"Would it suit you, Regina?"

"There's no question of suiting me. I've got myself where I can't be"—she smiled, a twitching, nervous smile—"where I can't be suited."

"Do you mean that you'd come with me—when you wouldn't want to?"

"Something like that."

"Why should you?"

"I've told you that. I've—I've let you see it—in what I've been doing for the past two years."

"So that I'm absolutely master?"

"That's it."

I turned away from her, walking to the other end of the long room. When I came back she was standing as I had left her, humbly, with eyes downcast, like a slave-girl put up for sale.

I paused in front of her.

"Do you know that your abandonment of will puts us both in an extraordinary position?"

"Yes." She went on presently, "But I know, too, that where you're concerned my will-power has left me."

"But that isn't like you."

She shook her head.

"No, it isn't. Generally my will is rather strong. But in this case— You see—I'd—I'd waited so long—and I'd never believed that you—that you cared anything—and now that I know you do—well, it's simply made me helpless. I've—I've no will at all."

"So that I must have enough for two?"

"I suppose so."

"And if I—if I carry you off—and make every one unhappy—and put you in a position where you'd be—where you'd be done for—that's what Annette calls it—the responsibility would be all mine?"

"I should never reproach you."

"In words."

"Nor in thought—if I could help it."

"But you mightn't be able to help it."

To this there was no reply. I took another turn to the end of the room. My freedom of action was terrifying. Since I could do with her what I liked, I was afraid to do anything. I came back and said so.

The old Regina woke as she murmured, "If you're afraid to do anything—do nothing."

"And what would you do?"

"I should let things take their course."

"Let things take their course—and marry him?"

"If things took their course that way."

"Do you mean that they mightn't take their course that way?"

"I'm not married to him yet. There are—there are difficulties."

I caught her by the arm. "Of what kind?"

"Of opinion chiefly—but of very vital opinion."

"Do you mean about the war?"

She said with a force like that of a suppressed cry: "He wants me not to have anything more to do with it! And I—I can't stop—not while it's going on. I—I must be doing something. It's one of the reasons why I could marry him—that he's a doctor—and I could take him over there—where they need him so much."

"And he won't go?"

"He doesn't say that exactly; but he doesn't want to. He thinks it's all wrong—that when it comes to brutality, one side is as bad as the other."

"Oh, he'll get over that—if you insist; and then you'll marry him."

"Perhaps so—if I haven't already married you."

"What makes you think you may have married me?"

"You said you'd make me."

And in the end, when Annette came back, we left it at that, with everything up in the air.

CHAPTER XXVI

MORE weeks followed, of which my record is chiefly in the drama of public events.

Vast as these were at the time, they seem even vaster in the retrospect. As my memory goes back to them they are like prodigious portents in the sky, awful to look at and still more awful to think about. A time will come when we shall find it amazing merely to have lived through such happenings.

Before the invaders the Rumanian towns were going down like houses built of blocks. In her attitude to Rumania, Russia was a mystery—a husband who sees his wife fighting for her life and doing hardly anything to help her. The rumors, true or false, that reached us might have been torn from some stupendous, improbable romance—a feeble Czar, a beautiful and traitorous Czarina, a corrupt nobility, an army betrayed, a people seething in dreams and furies and ignorance. Washington, having gone so far as to ask the Allied nations their peace conditions, had received them—restitution, reparation, and future security. Then late in that month of January, 1917, there came to people like me an unexpected shock. Before the Senate President Wilson delivered the speech of which the tag that ran electrically round the world was peace without victory.

I mention these things because they are the only waymarks of a time during which my private life seemed

to be drearily and hopelessly at a standstill. The deadlock of the nations reacted on myself. Mentally I was at grips with destiny, but nothing made any progress. I was exactly where I had started, as regards Regina, as regards Cantyre, as regards Annette, as regards the father and mother Barry. Outwardly I was on friendly terms with them all, and on no more than friendly terms with any one.

The Barrys invited me to dinner, and I went. Cantyre made up a theater party—he was fond of this form of recreation—and I went to that. Annette asked me to a Sunday lunch at which Cantyre and Regina were guests. The force of organized life held us together as a cohesive group; the operation of conventional good manners kept us to courtesies. That any one was happy I do not believe; but life threw its mask even on unhappiness.

I got in, of course, an occasional word with Regina, which, nevertheless, didn't help me. As far as I could observe, she lived and moved in a kind of hypnotic state, from which nothing I knew how to say could wake her. She was always waiting for me to give the word, and I was afraid to give it. If there was hypnotism, it affected us both, since I was as deeply in the trance as she.

Now and then, however, she came out of it with some brief remark which gave me a lead and perhaps made me hope. One such occasion was at the theater. Cantyre had not put me next to her, but there was an entr'acte when I found his place empty and slipped into it.

"And how are events taking their course?" I asked, with a semblance of speaking cheerily.

"I'm waiting to see."

"Still?"

"Still."

"And how long is that to go on?"

"Till events have shaped their course in a way that will tell me what to do."

"How shall you know that?"

"How does the twig know when the current takes it from the spot where it has been caught and carries it down-stream?"

"Oh, but you've got intelligence."

"Any intelligence I've got implores me to keep on waiting."

"So that you're not going to be married right away?"

"I shall not be married till I see it's the obvious thing to do."

"Not even to me?"

"That's different. I've already told you—"

"That if I give the word— But don't you see I can't give it?"

"Exactly. You're waiting for the sign as much as I am."

"What sign?"

"We shall recognize it when the time comes."

"Where will it come from?"

"Right up out of life; I don't know where, nor how."

"Who'll give it to us?"

She had only time, as Cantyre returned to his seat, to send me a long, slantwise look, with the underscored words, "You know!"

Another time was in the regrouping of guests, after Annette's luncheon. Finding myself beside her at a window, I asked the plain question, "Are you engaged to Cantyre?"

"I'm just where I was when I told you about it on board ship. He hasn't asked me to be more definite."

"Is he just where he was?"

"I think he is, in that—in that he expects me to marry him."

"And you leave him under that impression?"

"I don't know what else to do—till I get the sign."

"You're still looking for that?"

"Yes. Aren't you?"

"Not that I'm aware of."

"Oh, but you are, whether you're aware of it or not."

"And suppose he urges you before the sign comes?"

"I shall still wait."

"And suppose I urged you?"

"I'd take that as the sign."

And after the guests went I stayed behind and told the whole story to Annette. So long as there were no clandestine meetings under her roof, she was as detached and sympathetic and non-committal as a chorus in a Greek play.

"Why don't you give her the sign, if it's not a rude question?" she asked, while a marvelous succession of ripples circled over her duskiness.

"Because I'm afraid to. Think what it would mean to Cantyre, who's been so white with me all these years."

"As well as to every one concerned, including herself and you. I'm glad you've enough common sense to feel that. See here, Frank," she went on, kindly, "you've got to pull yourself out of this state of mind. It's doing you no good. When you ought to be at work for your country, which needs you desperately, you're sulking over a love-affair. Buck up! Be a sport! Be a man! There are lots of nice girls in New York. I'll find you some one."

But at that I ran away.

CHAPTER XXVII

WITHIN a few days I saw the correctness of Annette's summing up.

A medieval legend tells of an angel being sent to Satan with the message that God meant to take from the devil all the temptations with which he had seduced mankind. To this Satan resigned himself because he couldn't help it, begging of the angel that he should be left with just one—and that the least important. "Which?" asked the angel. "Depression," said Satan. The angel considered the request, found that depression cut but slight figure as a sin, and went back to heaven, leaving it behind him. "Good!" laughed Satan, as the celestial vision faded out. "In this one gift I've secured the whole bag of tricks."

And that is what I was to find.

I was depressed on leaving Europe. I grew more depressed because of the experience on board ship. In New York I was still more depressed. There was a month in which all things worked together for evil; and then I came to the place at which Satan had desired to have me.

I have not said that during all this time I made no attempt to look up my old friends at the Down and Out or, beyond an occasional argument with Cantyre, to fulfil the mission with which I had been intrusted. Ralph Coningsby had come and offered me work, and I had

refused it. Even the march of public events, with the introduction of lawless submarine warfare and the breaking off of diplomatic relations between Germany and the United States, hadn't roused me. I marked the slow rise of the impulse toward war in the breasts of the American people, as passionless and as irresistible as an incoming tide, but it seemed to have nothing to do with me. I was out of it, flung aside by a fate that had made sport of me.

I was so far from the current of whatever could be called life that I grew apathetic. Though I hadn't seen Regina for weeks, I sat down under the impalpable obstacles between us, making no effort to overcome them. I ate and drank and slept and brooded on the futility of living, and let the doing so fill my time. Lovey was worried, and dogged me round till there were minutes when I could have sprung on him and choked him.

Then came the afternoon when I decided that Satan must have his way.

There is a hotel in New York of which I had many recollections because I had frequented its barroom in the days before I went altogether down. It is a somewhat expensive-looking barroom, with heavy mahogany, gilded cornices, and frescoes of hunting-scenes on the wall. Hanging over the bar at any time during the day or night can be seen all the types that are commonly known as sporting, from the dashing to the cheap.

They might have been the same as on that day when I turned my back upon the place five years previously. They hung in the same attitudes; they called for the same drinks; they used the same profanities, though with some novelty in the slang. With my limp, my black patch, and my general haggardness, I felt like a ghost returning among them.

Timidly I approached a barman at leisure and asked for a cocktail of a brand for which I used to have a liking. I carried it off to a table placed inconspicuously behind the door leading to and from the hotel. Putting it on the table, I stared at its amber reflections.

I had come back to the same old place at last. It was curious; but there I was. All my struggling, all my wandering, all my up-hill work, all my days and nights in the trenches, all my suffering, all my love—everything had combined together to land me just here, where, so to speak, I had begun. It was the old story of dragging up the cliff, only to fall over the precipice. It seemed to be my fate. There was no escaping it.

I might not take more than that one drink during that afternoon; but I knew it would be a beginning. I should come back again; and I should come back again after that. Another type of man would do nothing of the kind; but I was my own type.

Very deliberately I said good-by to the world I had known for the past three years and more. I said good-by to work, to ambition, to salvation, to country, to love. Back, far back in my mind I was saying the same deliberate good-by to God. I shouldn't rest now till everything was gone.

The glass was still untasted on the table. I was taking my time. The farewells on which I was engaged couldn't be hurried. The fate in store for me would wait.

Then the door behind which I sat began to open. It opened slowly, timidly, stealthily, as if the person entering was afraid to come in. The action stirred the curiosity, and I watched.

Before I saw a face I saw a hand. Rather, I saw four fingers from the knuckles to the nails, as if some one was

steadying himself by the sheer force of holding on. They were old, thin, twisted fingers, and I knew at a glance I had seen them before.

The door continued to open, stealthily, timidly, slowly; and then, looking like a spirit rather than a man—a neat, respectable spirit wearing a silver star in his buttonhole, with trembling hands and a woeful quiver to the corner of his lower lip—Lovey stood in the barroom.

He stood as if he had never been in any such place before. He was like a visitant from some other sphere—dazed, diaphanous, unearthly.

He didn't look at the table behind the door. His gaze was far off. I could see it scanning the backs of the hangers across the bar. Then it went over the tables one by one, traveling nearer and nearer.

Just before the dim eyes reached me I said: "Hello, Lovey! Come and sit down. What 'll you have to drink?"

There seemed to be an interval between hearing my voice and actually seeing me—an interval during which a frosty, unnatural color, as if snow were suddenly to take fire, flared in his waxlike cheek. But he came to the table and dropped into a round-backed chair.

"Oh, Slim!"

Leaning on the table, he covered his face with his hand.

I tried putting up a bluff. "What's the matter, Lovey? Haven't got a headache, have you?"

He raised those pitiful, dead blue eyes. "No, but I've got a 'eartache, Slim—a 'eartache I won't never get over."

"Why, why—" I began to rally him.

"It's just what I was afeared of—for days and days I've been afeared of it. Been a-watchin' of you, I 'ave."

Here was another transmigrated soul that had traveled farther than I knew. It was in pure curiosity as to the changes wrought in him that I said: "I should think you would have been glad, Lovey. When I was here before you used to want to have us both go back."

The extinct eyes were raised on me.

"These times ain't them times. Everythin's different. I 'aven't stayed where I was in them days, not any more nor you. Oh, to think, to think!"

"To think what?"

"That you should 'ave come back to this—and me believin' the war 'ad done ye good—lifted you up, like. Not but what you was the best man ever lived before the war—"

"Oh no, Lovey. No one knows what I was better than yourself."

"You was good even then, sonny—even in them awful old days. Goodness ain't just in doin' certain things; it's in being certain things. I don't 'ardly know what it is; but I can tell it when I see it. And I seen it in you, Slim—right from the first. Me and God A'mighty seen it together. That's why He pulled you up out o' what you was—and made you rich—and dressed you in swell clo'es—and sent you to the war—and made you a 'ero—and stuck you all over with medals—and brought you 'ome again to me. And if you'd only waited—"

"Well, if I'd only waited—what?"

"You'd 'a' got somethink better still. You'd 'a' got it pretty soon."

"What should I have got?"

"I ain't a-goin' to tell ye. If you'd come 'ome with me you'd see." Before I could follow up this dark hint he continued: "God A'mighty don't play no tricks on

"That you should 'ave come back to this—and me believin' the war 'ad done ye good—lifted you up, like. Not but what you was the best man ever lived before the war—"

His children. Look at me! All He's give me. Kep' me well while you was away—and 'elped me to knock off the booze when it was mortal 'ard to do it—and pervided me with a good 'ome, thanks to you, Slim!—and work—and wages—and a very nice man to work for, all except bein' a bit stuck on 'isself—and let me off washin' windows, which was never a trade for an eddicated man like me—and brought you back to me, which was the best thing of all—and just because I waited."

"What do you mean by waiting?"

"I mean waitin' for Him. That's somethink I've found out since you went away, sonny. It's a tip as Beady Lamont give me. You've got to wait patient-like for Him; and if you do He'll come to you."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Of course you don't. That's why I'm a-tellin' of you. It was like this: When you went away it was somethink fierce for me—nothink but that empty flat—and everythin' speakin' to me o' you, like—yer clo'es and yer boots and yer books and yer pipes, and the chairs you used to sit on, and the bed you used to sleep in—and everythink like that—till I thought I was goin' crazy. Many's the time I wanted to come and do just what you're a-doin' of now—but I'd think o' the promise I give you before ye went—and I'd 'ang on a bit more. And then God A'mighty Hisself come and spoke to me, just as He did to Beady Lamont that time he told us about when we was in the blue stars."

"And what did God Almighty say?"

"He come in the middle o' the night, and woke me up out of a sound sleep—"

"How did you know it was He?"

"Oh, I knowed. Ye couldn't 'elp knowin'."

"Did you hear His voice?"

"Ye didn't 'ave to 'ear. It just went all over ye, like. I sits up in bed, and everything was dark and light at the same time, and something awful comfortin' like sweepin' through and through me. Ye couldn't 'ardly say it was 'earin' or seein' or feelin' or nothink. It was just understandin', like—but you knowed it was there."

"But you haven't told me what He said."

"That's what I'm a-comin' to. He says: 'Lovey,' says He, 'you've put up a good fight, and now ye're over the worst of it. But I'm with ye all the time,' says He; 'only I can't give ye everythin' to oncet. All ye can take is what ye've made yerself fit to receive,' says He; 'because there was a good many years in yer life when ye wasn't fit to receive nothink. But just you wait, and you'll see 'ow good I'll be to you by degrees,' says He. 'You go on fightin' in your way, just as that young fella, Slim, is fightin' in his way, and I'll do you both good, and bring you back to each other,' says He. And, oh, sonny, He's kep' His word—all but right up till now, when you've been goin' about that sad-like—and not wantin' to be 'ome. And now this!"

"But that's not God, Lovey; that's me."

"I don't see much difference. The most ways I gets a'old o' God, as you might say, is through the nice things people does for me—and the nice people theirselves—especially men—I don't 'old with women—and more particular you, Slim—you that was more to me than my own children ever was—than my own life—yes, sonny, than my own life. I ain't a-goin' to live very long now—"

"What makes you think so?"

"I 'appen to know," he replied, briefly. "There's ways you can tell."

"What ways?"

"Smellin', for one thing. Ye can smell death just as easy as ye can smell flowers, or the fryin' o' fish, or any other smell; and it's a sign ye'll never be mistook in." His ascetic profile was thrown up, with a long sniff through his delicate, quivering nostrils. "I can smell it now—just like the smell o' liquor." The profile came down, and he went on, eagerly: "But what I'm tellin' you is that if I could die to save you from what ye're beginnin' to do this day, Slim, I'd do it cheerful. I knowed you was bent on it before ye knowed it yerself. I've been a-watchin' on ye, and follerin' you about when ye didn't see me."

"How did you know?"

"I can't tell ye 'ow—not no more than I could tell you I knowed it was God. It don't matter 'ow you know things as long as you know them, does it?"

"Perhaps not."

"I've just been a-livin' in yer skin ever since ye come 'ome, sonny. It was as if all yer thoughts passed through my mind, and all yer feelin's through my 'eart. I ain't much of a 'and at love—that kind of female love, I mean—not now, I ain't; but I know that when ye're young it kind o' ketches you—"

"Stop, Lovey," I said, warningly.

"All right, Slim, I'll stop. I don't need to go on. All I want to say is that you don't know—you couldn't know—the fancy I've took to you—and I used to think that you kind o' 'ad a fancy for me, like."

"So I have."

The mild eyes searched me. There was a violent trembling of the lower lip.

"Do you mean that, Slim?" Before I could answer he

added, proudly: "I don't need to 'ave no one sayin' they've got a fancy for me when they 'aven't."

"Oh, but it's true!"

Two shivering hands were stretched out toward me in dramatic appeal.

"Oh, then leave that there drink alone and come 'ome along o' me." His eyes fell on the glass. "'Ow many o' them things 'ave ye 'ad?"

"None yet; this is the first; and I haven't tasted it."

He straightened himself up, speaking with what I can only call a kind of exaltation.

"Then God A'mighty has sent me to you in time. It's Him—and except Him 'tain't no one nor nothink. Slim, if you puts yer lips to that glass now ye'll be sinnin' in His face just as much as if it was Him and not me as was a-pleadin' with ye."

"It isn't a sin to take a cocktail."

"Not for every one, I don't suppose. It wouldn't be for the doctor; and it wouldn't be for Mr. Coningsby; but 'tis for me, and 'tis for you. There's take-it-and-leave-it people in the world, and there's take-it-and-be-damned; and you and me belongs to the last. Oh, Slim, don't be mad wi' me! Ain't ye a silver-star man in the Down and Out? Ain't I yer next friend—yer real next friend, that is—a great deal more than that young Pyn, with 'is impotent tongue, what stood up with you? Come 'ome along o' me, and I'll show you somethin' good."

It was the dark hint again.

"What are you driving at, Lovey? What is there at home?"

His reply might have been paraphrased from a writing he had never heard of.

"There's things ahead of you, Slim, different from what you're expectin' of. Wait."

I confess to being startled. You must see me as in an overwrought condition, reacting from the tremendous strain, first of fighting, then of blindness, and thirdly of emotional stress. I do not pretend that more than any other man who comes back from the jaws of the infernal brazier in Flanders I was my normal self. I was easily up and easily down, easily excited and easily impressed. The mere cast of Lovey's two brief sentences impressed me.

"What things?" I asked, with that mixture of credulity and rejection with which one puts questions to a trance medium.

"I'll not tell ye; I'll show ye; only ye must come 'ome." As if in illustration of his words, he added, "Ye must begin to wait right now."

"But why wait?"

"Because God A'mighty can't give us everything to oncet. Didn't I say He told me that Hisself? We ain't fit to receive more 'n a little at a time, just like babies. That's another tip as Beady give me. And Mr. Christian he p'inted out to me oncet that wait is one of the frequentest words in the Bible. See here! Beady writ this for me." Fumbling in an inside pocket, he drew forth a carefully folded bit of paper, saying, as he did so: "It was one of the times when I was awful low in my mind because you was away. I don't 'old with them low fellas at the Down and Out—not as a reg'lar thing, I don't—but now and then when I just couldn't seem to get along without you I'd go down to one of the meetin's. Then oncet Beady sits beside me and begins a-kiddin' o' me, callin' me old son and everything like that. But by 'n'

by he sees I wasn't in no such humor, and we starts in to talk serious-like. And then—well, I don't 'ardly know 'ow I come to let it out—but Beady he sees just 'ow it was with me, and he bucks me up and writes me this. He ain't as bad as you'd think he'd be, that Beady. It's good words out of the Bible, and there's a reg'lar tip in 'em."

The shaky hands unfolded the bit of foolscap on which was scrawled in a laborious script:

"Wait on the Lord; wait, I say, on the Lord."

Beneath this counsel from one psalm were the verses from another:

"I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings."

I suppose you will call my impulse by some modern psychological name, and for aught I know you may be right. But the words were not without their effect on me. They came to me with the mystery of a message emanating from the days before Time, and from spheres which have no need of the sun to rise or of the moon to give brightness or of the light of any candle. That it was carried to me by this tottering old man whom I had known in such different conditions only added to the awe.

I struggled to feet that were as shaky as Lovey's hands, carried my little white ticket to the bookkeeper, paid for my drink, which I had left untouched, and flinging an "All right, Lovey; I'm your man!" to him, hobbled out into the lobby of the hotel.

My immediate sensation was that which you have known when the black cloud of troubles that enveloped you on waking has been instantly dispelled on your get-

ting out of bed. The troubles may still be there; but you know your competence to live and work and deal with them.

What I felt chiefly, I think, was that the old temptation would never master me again. I had been face to face with it, and hadn't submitted to its spell. Something had been healed in me; something had been outgrown. A simple old man with no eloquence but that of his affection had led me as another might be led by a child.

With this sense of release came a sense of energy. I was given back to my mission; my mission was given back to me. That which for lack of a more humble term I can only call the spirit of consecration took hold of me again and made me its own. The aims for which the war was being fought were my aims; I had no others. When these objectives were won my life, it seemed to me, would be over. It would melt away in that victory as dawn into sunrise. It would not be lost; it would only be absorbed—a spark in the blaze of noonday.

And as for love—well, after all, there was the moratorium of love. My lot in this respect—if it was to be my lot—would be no harder than that of millions of other men the wide world over. Love was no longer the first of a man's considerations, not any more than the earning of a living could be the first. It might be a higher thing for her—a higher thing for me—to give it up.

Turning these things over in my mind and wondering vaguely what might be awaiting me at the apartment, I said nothing to Lovey as we trundled homeward in a taxicab; nor did Lovey say anything to me.

It was only when we got out of the lift and he had turned the key in our own door that he said, with sudden

energy: "Slim, I'll be yer servant right down to the very ground."

"Oh no, you won't be, Lovey," I returned, deprecatingly. "We're fellas together. We're buddies. We'll be buddies as long as we live."

He slapped his leg with a cackle that was, as nearly as his old lungs could make it, a heartfelt, mirthful laugh.

"There! Didn't I tell you? That's what I've been a-waitin' for; and the Lord has give it to me at last. He can't do much more for me now—not till He takes me 'ome, like." He raised his sharp profile and sniffed. "I smell it, Slim—a kind o' stuffy smell it is now—but I ain't mistook in it. And now, Slim," he went on, triumphantly, as he threw the door open and entered before me to turn on the lights—"and now, Slim, what you're a-waitin' for is—is waitin' 'ere for you."

I knew it couldn't be Regina that Lovey was caging in these overheated rooms, since she wouldn't be sitting in the dark.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IT was not Regina Barry who was waiting for me, but it was the next best thing.

Lovey stood off and pointed to it as it lay, white and oblong, on the sitting-room table.

"Give it to me with 'er own 'and," he said, mysteriously. "Druv up to the door and asked the janitor to call me down. Told me to tell you that it wouldn't be at 'alf past four, as she says in the note, but at five, and 'oped you wouldn't keep 'er waitin'."

I held it in my hand, turning it over. I felt sure of what was in it, but I didn't know whether I was sorry or glad. Of course I should be glad from one point of view; but the points of view were so many. It would be all over now with the mission, for which my enthusiasm had so suddenly revived. When we had done this thing we should be discredited and ostracized by the people we knew best, and for some time to come.

I stood fingering the thing, feeling as I had felt now and then when we had given up a trench or a vantage-point we had been holding against odds. Wise as it might be to yield, it was, nevertheless, a pity, and only left ground that would have to be regained. There was moral strength, too, in the mere fact of holding. Not to hold any longer was a sign of weakness, however good the reason.

I broke the seal slowly, saying, as I did so, "Did she say where?"

"No, Slim; she didn't say nowhere."

"Only that I was not to keep her waiting."

He thought again. "Punctual was 'er word."

She needn't, however, have said that. Of course I should be punctual. All might depend on my being on the spot at the moment when the clock struck. I still hesitated at drawing out the sheet. As a matter of fact I was wondering if she had received the sign she had talked about, and if so, what it was.

After all, it was an unimportant note.

DEAR FRANK, — Mother has allowed me to ask Doctor Feltring—a lady—who retreated with the Serbian Army into Albania, to speak at our house at half-past four to-morrow afternoon. Will you come? We shall all be glad to see you.

Yours, REGINA.

That was all. I should have felt a certain relief that nothing was irrevocably settled had there not been in the envelope another page. On it were written the words: "Are you trying the indirect method? If so, I think you will find it unwise."

If I read this once I must have read it twenty times, trying to fathom its meaning.

I could only think that she was gently charging me with my apathy. The indirect method was the inactive method. I had let weeks go by not only without saying the word which she had told me she would obey, but without making any attempt to get speech with her.

And yet it seemed to me that any other woman in the world might have resented this but Regina. It was a kind of resentment unlike her. She was too proud, too intense. Even in the hypnotic state induced by the knowledge, after years of doubt, that we cared for each

other, she had kept her power of resistance. She would come with me if I made her, but she hoped I wouldn't make her. That hope made it difficult for me to impose myself on any one at once so willing and so reluctant. Of what, from different angles, each of us owed to Cantyre—not to mention any one else—she was as sensitively aware as I was.

I could hardly believe, therefore, that she was reproaching me; and yet what else did she mean?

I tried to learn that on the following day, but found access to her difficult. Since she was hostess to the speaker of the afternoon as well as to some sixty or eighty guests, mostly ladies, this was scarcely strange. I was limited, therefore, to the two or three seconds during which I was placing in her hands a cup of tea. Even then there was a subject as to which I more pressingly desired information.

"I see Stephen isn't here."

She couldn't keep out of her eyes what I read as a kind of crossfire, expressive of contradictory emotions.

"He wouldn't come."

"Why not?"

"He didn't like the subject."

"Because it was medicine?"

"Because it was war."

"But if this country goes in?"

"He doesn't believe it will. He thinks the breaking off of our relations with Germany will do all for which we can be called on. We'll never fight, he says. Even if we declare war he's sure it will only be in name."

I was not so much interested in Cantyre's opinions as in the way in which she would take them.

"And you?"

"Oh, I think he's only kicking against the pricks. He can't think like that."

I gave her a look which I tried to make significant. "You mean that he's taking the indirect method?"

She gazed off to the other side of the room. "Oh, that isn't the indirect method."

"What does the indirect method involve?"

But here Mrs. Endsleigh Jarrott butted in—I have no other term for it—with a question, which she asked as if her life depended on the answer, "Regina, didn't you think the action of that English nurse in going over the mountains with the band of little Serbian boys the most heroic thing you ever heard of?"

So I came away without having learned what it was I was doing, but not less determined to find out.

I resolved to try Cantyre. My meetings with him had become not exactly rare, but certainly infrequent. I had hardly noticed the decline of our intimacy while it was going on; I only came to a sudden realization of it when I said to myself I would look in on him that night.

It occurred to me in the first place that I had not looked in on him of my own accord since I had come home. I had gone round the elbow of the corridor once or twice when he had invited me, but never of my own initiative. Then it struck me that it was some time since he himself had come knocking at my door.

"Lovey, when was the doctor last in here?"

He was in the "kitchingette" and came to the threshold slowly. When he did so there was that scared look on his face I had seen on the previous afternoon.

"I don't rightly know, Slim."

"Isn't it more than a week ago?"

He considered. "It might be."

"Do you know any reason why he doesn't come?"

He seemed to be defending himself against an accusation.

"Why, Slim! 'Ow sh'd I know?"

"Well, you see him every day—in and out of his room with his boots and things."

"He don't 'ardly ever speak to me."

"And don't you ever speak to him?"

He fidgeted nervously. "Oh, I passes the time o' day, like, and tells him if his pants need pressin' and little things like that."

"Does he ever say anything about me?"

"Not lately he don't."

"Have you any idea why not?"

"I might 'ave a hidea, Slim; but what's servants' gossip, after all?"

As he had me there I dropped the subject, stealing round to Cantyre's quarters about eleven that night.

To my knock, which was timid and self-conscious, he responded with a low "Come in" that lacked the heartiness to which he had accustomed me. As usual at this hour, he was in an elaborate dressing-gown, and also as usual the room was heavy with the scent of flowers. He was not lounging in an arm-chair, but sitting at his desk with his back to me, writing checks.

"Oh, it's you!" he said, without turning his head.

"Thought I'd drop in on you."

He went on writing. "Do you want to sit down?"

"Not if you're busy."

"Got some bills to pay."

"Oh, then I'll come another time."

Having gone in for one bit of information, I went out with another. Cantyre knew.

I was not only sorry for his knowing, I was surprised at it. During the two months we had been in New York both Regina and I had been notably discreet. We had been discreet for the reasons that all the strings were in our own hands, and it depended solely on ourselves as to which we pulled. We alone were the responsible parties. That poor Cantyre shouldn't have to suffer before we knew whether we meant to make him suffer or not had been a matter of concern to us both.

If he knew, it was, therefore, not from me; and neither was it from Regina. There remained Annette, but she was as safe as ourselves. Further than Annette I couldn't think of any one.

I should have been more absorbed by this question had I not waked to new elements in the world drama, as one wakes to a sudden change in the weather. My surprise came not from any knowledge of new facts, but from the revival of my own faculty for putting two and two together. There had been a month in which depression had produced a kind of mental hibernation. When at the end of February I emerged from it the New World in particular had moved immeasurably far forward.

Now that I came to notice it, I saw a change as perceptible as that in the wind in the whole American national position. As silently as the wind shifts to a new point of the compass a hundred millions of people had shifted their point of view. They were moving it onward day by day, with a rapidity of which they themselves were unconscious.

The titanic facts were to the undercurrent of events but as the volcano to the fire at the heart of the earth. The heart of all human life being now ablaze, there was here and there a stupendous outburst which was but a

symptom of the raging flame beneath. There was the U-boat blockade of Great Britain, endangering all the maritime nations of the world. There was the American diplomatic break with Germany. There was the guarding of the German ships interned in American ports. There was the torpedoing of an American steamer off the Scilly Isles. There was Mr. Wilson's invitation to the neutral nations to join him in the breach with the German Emperor. And then on the 26th the President went in person before Congress to ask authority to use armed force to protect American rights.

These, I say, were but volcanic incidents. The impressive thing to me was the transformation of a people by a process as subtle as enchantment.

Two months earlier they had been neutral, and sitting tight on their neutrality. The war was three thousand miles away. It had been brewed in the cursed vendettas of nations of some of which the every-day American hardly knew the names. It was tragic for those peoples; but they whose lives were poisoned by no hereditary venom were not called on to take part. Zebulun and Naphtali from sheer geographical position might be obliged to hazard their lives to the death; but Asher could abide in his ports, and Gilead beyond Jordan. That had been the kind of reasoning I heard as late as the time of my arrival.

On my return to New York in November, I found a nation holding its judgments and energies in suspense. What by the end of February interested me most was the spectacle of this same people urging forward, surging upward, striving, straining toward a goal which every one knew it would take strength and sacrifice to reach.

Between this approach to war and that of any of the

other great powers there was this difference: They had taken the inevitable step while in the grip of a great stress. They sprang to their arms overnight. They had no more choice than a man whose house is on fire as to whether or not he will extinguish it. Out of the bed of their luxurious existence they were called as if by conflagration. Whether they would lose their lives or escape with them was a question they had no time to consider. They went up to the top notch of the heroic in an instant, not knowing the danger they were facing or the courage they displayed.

Here, on the other hand, was a people who saw everything from a long way off. For nearly three years their souls had been sickened with the tale of blood. Gilead might abide beyond Jordan and Asher in his ports, but no atrocious detail had been spared them. They knew, therefore, just what they were doing, exactly what was before them. I can hardly say that they made their choice; they grew toward it. They grew toward it calmly, deliberately, clear-sightedly; and for this very reason with an incomparable bravery. If I were an American citizen instead of the American citizen's blood-brother, I might not say this; I might not have been aware of it. In any family the outsider can see that which escapes the observation of the daughter or the son. I heard no born American comment on this splendid, tranquil, leisurely readjustment of the spirit to a new, herculean task; perhaps no born American noticed it; but to me as an onlooker, interested and yet detached, it was one of the most grandiose movements of an epoch in which the repetition of the grandiose bewilders the sense of proportion, as on the first days in the Selkirks or the Alps.

It was at this time I heard that Regina was addressing meetings. They were women's club meetings, and I learned from Annette that she was speaking with success.

"She seems to have come out of a sort of trance," Annette observed of her, using the word I had used myself. "Ever since she came home she's been like a girl walking in her sleep. Now she's waked and is like her old self."

Since Annette knew my story, or part of it, I thought it no harm to ask, "To what do you attribute it?"

But Annette refused to lend herself to my game.

"I attribute it to her getting over the long strain. It's natural that you people who've been over there should be dazed or jumpy or something. She's been dazed."

"And what do you think I've been?"

"Oh, you've been the same," she laughed; "but then, you're always queer."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE news with regard to Regina acted on me as a twofold stimulus.

In the first place, it sent me back at last to the Down and Out. If she had waked, I, too, would wake; and since she was actively pleading the great cause, I would do the same. I didn't go to a meeting, but dropped in during a forenoon. The house was even humbler and dingier than I remembered it, but as scrupulously neat and clean. In the back sitting-room were half a dozen men, all of the type to which I had once belonged and with whom I felt a sympathy so overwhelming as to surprise myself. Perhaps because I had seen so much of what could be made of human material even when it was destined to be no more than cannon fodder in the end, I was sorry to see this waste.

With one exception I placed them as all under thirty. They were good-looking fellows in the main, who would respond amazingly to drill. After that impetus to the inner self, of which the Down and Out had the secret, plenty of work, a regular life, food, water, and sleep would renew them as the earth is renewed by spring. No missionary ever longed to bring a half-dozen promising pagans into the Christian fold more ardently than I to see these five or six poor wastrels transformed into fighting-men.

For the minute there was no official there but little

Spender, whose bliss in life was in opening the Down and Out door. Having led me across the empty front sitting-room, he said, as I stood in the gap of the folding-doors:

"Say, brothers! This is Slim. Come in here four or five years ago, just as low down as any of you, and look at him now!"

I did feel enormously tall, in spite of the high studding of the room, as well as enormously big in my ample military overcoat. To the six who sat in that woeful outward idleness, of which I knew the inner secret preoccupation, I must have been an atonishing apparition. Only a very commanding presence could summon these men from the desolate land into which their spirits were wandering; but for once in my life I did it. All eyes were fixed on me; every jaw dropped in a kind of awe.

Knowing the habits and needs of such a stupor, I merely threw off my overcoat, entered, and sat down. Any greeting I made was general and offhand. Apart from that I sat and said nothing.

I sat and said nothing because I knew it was what they liked. They liked the companionship, as babies and dogs like companionship, though their aching minds could not have responded to talk. There was no embarrassment in this silence, no expectation. It was a stupefied pleasure to them to stare at the uniform, to speculate inchoately as to the patch on my eye; and that little was enough.

Nobody read; nobody smoked. I neither smoked nor read; I only sat as in a Quaker meeting, waiting for the first movement of the spirit.

It came when a husky voice, that seemed to travel from across a gulf, said, without any particular reason, "I'm Spud."

I turned to my right, to see a good-looking, brown-eyed fellow, of perhaps twenty-eight, trying to reach me, as it were, with his pathetic, despairing gaze.

I knew what was behind this self-introduction. The lost identity was trying to find itself; the man who was worthy of something was doing his utmost to get out of the abyss by reaching up his hands to the man who had got out.

"All right, Spud," I said, heartily. "Put it there! We're going to be friends."

Silence for another five minutes was broken when a high voice recited in a sort of litany, "I'm Jimmy McKeever, traveler for Grubbe & Oates, gents' furnishers."

Sharp-faced, wiry, catlike, agile, tough as wire, I could see this fellow creeping out into the darkness of No Man's Land, and creeping back with information of the enemy.

I broke in on the litany to say: "Good for you, Jimmy, old boy! Glad to know you. Let's shake hands."

He sprang from his seat on the outskirts of the group, but before he could reach me a great, brawny paw was stretched forward by a blue-eyed young Hercules sitting nearer me, which grasped my fingers as if in a vise. There was then a scramble of handshaking, each of the bunch asserting his claim for recognition, like very small children. The older man alone held aloof, sitting by himself, scowling, hard-faced, cross-legged, kicking out a big foot with a rapid, nervous rhythm.

It was he who, when the handshaking was over, snarled out the question, "What's the matter with your eye?"

I told them the story of how I lost it.

I told it as simply as I could, while working in a fair share of the strong color which I hoped would arrest their attention.

It did. In all my experience of men coming back into life from the state which is so expressively known as dead drunk it was the first time I ever saw them listen with avidity to any voice but that of the inner man.

What is there about war which speaks with this authority? Where did it get its power to go to the hidden man of the heart, that subliminal self with which modern speculation has been so busy, and shift him from off his age-long base? It is commonly said that, whatever our personal vicissitudes, human nature remains the same; but though that may be true of the past, I doubt if it will be true of the future. War on the scale on which we are waging it has already changed human nature. It has changed it as the years change a baby to a boy and a boy to a man. It has lifted human nature up, drawn out of it what we never supposed to be there, freed it from its slavery to time. It has to a large degree reversed the processes of time as it has reversed the usages of sex. We have seen youth doing the work of maturity, maturity that of youth, women that of men, men that of women. We have seen cowards transformed into heroes, rotters into saints, stupid, idiotic ne'er-do-wells into saviors of mankind.

We shall never go back again to the helpless conviction that youth must grow slowly into age, only to have age decay into ugliness and senility. This kind of foolish, useless progress may still go on for an indefinite time to come, but we shall work against it as against something contrary to the highest possibilities of nature. Since we have thrown off our mental shackles in great moments, we shall see that we can do the same in small, and, having emerged on a higher plane, we shall stay there. Staying there, we shall doubtless go on in time to a higher

plane still—a plane on which the mighty works that are now wrought in war will become feasible in peace. We are not on that plane yet; but if the advance of the human race means anything we shall get there. It may take a thousand years; it may take more; it may take less; but in the mean time we must seize our blessings as we may.

So these fellows listened to my tale as raptly as if a trumpet were sounding in their ears. It was like a summons to them to come out of stupefaction. They asked questions not only as to my own experiences, but as to the causes and purposes of the war in general. I do not affirm that they were the most intelligent questions that could be asked; but for men in their condition they were astonishing.

That they were not of necessity to be easy converts I could see when the old chap sitting apart asked again, in his bitter voice, "Did you ever kill a fellow-creetur that had the same right to live as yourself?"

As we discussed that aspect of the subject, too, I found it difficult to restrain my audience from the free fight for which at the Down and Out there was always an inclination.

I accomplished this, however, and as I rose to go the brawny Hercules sidled shyly up to me with the words: "Say! I'm a Canuck. Peterfield, Ontario, is where I hail from. Why ain't I in this here war?"

He was my first recruit. A few weeks later he was in uniform in Montreal. My object in telling you about him is to point out the fact that I made a beginning, and that from the beginning the sympathy of the City of Comrades upheld me. Little by little that movement by which the whole of America was being shaken out of its

materialism, its provincialism, and its mental isolation reached us in Vandiver Street, and we began to see that there were subjects of conversation more commanding than that of drink. What I may call a war party rose among us, and the sentiment that we ought to be in it was expressed.

"We shall be in it when the time comes," Andrew Christian said to me when we were alone for a few minutes after I had been talking with the men one day. "One of the great mistakes human impatience makes is in trying to hurry the methods by which the divine mind counteracts human errors. We forget that it is not for us to know the times or the seasons that the Father hath put into His own power. Things that take place in their own way generally take place in His. And the overruling force of His way, when we let it alone, working simply, naturally, and as a matter of course, is one of the extraordinary features of history."

I was the more impressed by these quiet words for the reason that I saw that he, too, was one of the Americans chafing under the long holding back of his country. No one I had seen since my return was more changed in this respect than he. I had left a man who had but one object in his life, the salvation of other men from drink. I found a man marvelously broadened, heightened, illumined, almost transfigured by a larger set of purposes.

But he spoke so calmly!

"We shall go into this thing the more thoroughly when our people as a whole are convinced of its necessity. And for a hundred millions of people to be convinced is a matter that takes time. But even there you can see how a great purpose is changing them almost against their own will. It isn't many months ago that they

elected a President on the slogan, 'He kept us out of war.' Had it not been for that slogan it's doubtful whether or not he would have been elected. All politics apart, we can say that, had he not been elected, it's doubtful whether any other candidate could carry with him a united Congress when we come to the moment of decision. Were the President not to have a united Congress, behind him, there would be no united people. As it is we're all forging forward together, President, Congress, and people, as surely as winter forges forward into spring; and when the minute arrives—"

He broke off with a smile I can only call exalted. With a hasty pressure of my hand he was off to some other fellow with some other needful word.

CHAPTER XXX

MY purpose in telling you all this is to show you why I reacted so slightly to Regina's charge of the indirect method. Though my curiosity as to what she meant was keen enough, the pressure of other interests allowed it no time to work. This is to say, as soon as I got back into the current of great events personal concerns became relatively unimportant. They had to wait. One developed the capacity to keep them waiting.

But toward the middle of March I met her one day in Fifth Avenue. Even from a distance I could see that her step was vigor and her look animation. The haunting sadness had fled from her eyes, while the generous smile, spontaneous and flashing, had returned to her scarlet lips. It was a new Regina because it was the old one.

To me her first exclamation was: "How well you look! You're almost as you were before the war."

Though I was conscious of a pang at seeing her so far from pining away, I endeavored to play up.

"Mayn't I say the same of you? What's done it?"

She laughed. "Oh, I don't know. Work, I suppose —and the knowledge that things are marching."

"I hear you're very busy."

"I hear you're busy, too."

"People do seem to want to be told things at first hand."

"I find the same."

"And so one has to be on the job."

"There's nothing like it, is there? It"—she flung me one of her old, quick, daring glances—"it fills all the needs. Nothing else becomes urgent."

"You mean that one's personal affairs—"

"Oh, one has no personal affairs. I remember a man who was in the San Francisco earthquake telling me that for forty-eight hours he hardly needed to eat or sleep."

"I've seen that doubled and trebled."

"Of course you have. It simply means that when we get out of ourselves we can make supermen of the commonest material."

I ventured to say: "You look happy, Regina. Are you?"

"Are you?"

I weighed this in order to answer her truthfully.

"If I'm not happy I'm—I'm content—content to be doing something—the least little bit—to urge things forward."

"And I can say the same. If I look well, as you put it, that's the reason. And so long as that's the reason other things can—wait." She added, quickly: "I must go now or I shall be late. I'm speaking to the women at the Mary Chilton Club, and I'm overdue."

She had actually passed on when I stopped her to say, "What do you mean by the indirect method?"

She called back over her shoulder, "Ask Stephen."

And I asked him that night. Having heard him come into his room between eight and nine o'clock, I marched in boldly, bearding him without beating about the bush.

"I say, old Stephen, what have you been saying to Regina about me?"

His hat had been thrown on the table; his arms were outstretched in the act of taking off his overcoat.

He repeated my question as if he didn't understand it.

"What have I been saying to Regina about you? Why, nothing—much."

"Nothing much; that means something. What the deuce do you mean by the indirect method?"

"I haven't spoken of an indirect method."

"No; but she has!"

"Oh, I see."

"Then if you see, tell me what it is."

He finished the arrested act of taking off his coat, after which he hung it up in a closet, doing the same with his hat. The minute's delay allowed time for the storm-clouds to gather on his face, and all the passions of a gloomy-hearted nature to concentrate in a hot, thundery silence.

"Is this a bit of bluff, Frank?"

"Bluff be hanged! I'm ready to speak out frankly."

The storm-clouds were torn with a flash like a streak of lightning.

"Then why didn't you come to me like a man instead of sending that sneaking old beast—"

"Hold on, Stephen. What sneaking old beast have I sent?"

"He wouldn't have come unless you had set him on me. You needn't tell me that."

"What the deuce are you talking about?"

"You know what I'm talking about. There hasn't been a day since you came back that I haven't had a hint." He was not a man to whom anger came easily; he began to choke, to strangle with the effort to get his indignation out. "I'd have given him the toe of my

boot long ago if—if—if—if"—the words positively shivered on his lips—"if—if—if I hadn't wanted to see how far you'd go; and, by God! I've—I've had enough of it!"

"Enough of what, Stephen?" I endeavored to ask, quietly.

He knocked his knuckles on the table with a force that almost made them bleed.

"My name is Cantyre—do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand. But tell me, what is it you've had enough of?"

"I've had enough of your damned diplomatic slyness in setting that old reptile on me!"

I am not quick tempered. The tolerance born of a too painful knowledge of my own shortcomings obliges me to be slow to wrath. But when anger does get hold of me it works a change like that of a powerful chemical agent suddenly infused into the blood.

I turned and strode out. A few times in the trenches I had been the victim of this rage to kill—and I had killed. How many I killed at one time or another I now couldn't tell you. I saw too red to keep the count. All I know is that I have stuck my bayonet into heart after heart, and have dashed out brains with the butt end of my rifle. It is all red before me still—a great splash of blood on the memory.

But I had got the habit. In a rage like this to kill some one had become an instinct. I could not have believed that the impulse would have pursued me into civil life; but there it was.

Having flung open the door of my apartment, I marched straight for the "kitchingette." Lovey was seated on a stool beside the tiny gas-range, polishing one of my boots. The boot was like a boxing-glove on his left hand, while

he held the brush suspended in his right, looking up at me with the piteous appeal of a rabbit pleading for its life.

His weakness held me back from striking him, but it didn't stem my words.

"Who the devil, you old snake, gave you the right to interfere in my affairs?"

He simply looked up at me, the boot on one hand, the brush suspended in the other. His lower lip trembled—his arms began to tremble—but he made no attempt to defend himself.

"What have you been saying?" I demanded. "Speak, can't you?"

But he couldn't. I caught him by the collar and dragged him to his feet.

He had just the strength to stand on them, though his limp hands continued to hold the boot and the brush.

"Now are you going to speak? Or shall I kick you out?"

"You'd kick me out, Slim?"

The mildness of his voice maddened me.

"By God, I would!"

The brush and the boot fell with a dull clatter to the floor.

"Then I'd better go."

He looked about him helplessly till his eyes fell on the old felt hat hanging on a peg. I watched him as he took it down and crammed it on his head. There was another helpless searching as if he didn't know what he was looking for before he spied an old gnarled stick in a corner. Taking that in his hand, he fumbled his way into the living-room.

By the time I had followed him I was beginning to re-

lent. I had not really meant to have him go, but I was not ready as yet to call him back. What Cantyre must have thought of me, what Regina must have thought of me, in egging so poor a creature on to say what I wouldn't say myself, roused me as to a more intense degree I used to be roused on hearing of Belgian women treated with the last indignities, and Canadian soldiers crucified. Had I stopped to consider I would have seen that Regina didn't believe it, and that Cantyre believed it only as far as it gave an outlet to his complicated inward sufferings; but I didn't stop to consider. Perhaps I, too, was seeking an outlet for something repressed. At any rate, I let the poor old fellow go.

"What about your things?" I asked, before he had reached the door.

He turned with a certain dignity. "I sha'n't want no things." He added, however, "Ye do mean me to get out, Slim?"

I didn't—but I didn't want to tell him so. Fury had cooled down without leaving me ready to retract what I had said. I meant to go after him—when he had got as far as the lift—but I meant, too, that he should take those few bleeding steps of anguish.

He took them—not to the lift, but out into the vestibule. Then I heard a faint moan; then a sound as if something broke; and then a soft tumbling to the floor.

When I got out he was lying all in a little huddled, senseless heap, with a cut on his forehead where he had struck the key or the door-knob as he fell.

It was more than an hour before Cantyre got him back to consciousness; but it was early morning before he spoke. We had stayed with him through the night, as

he had shown all the signs of passing out. His recovery of speech somewhere about dawn came as a surprise to us.

To Cantyre I had given but the slightest explanation of the accident, being sure, however, that he guessed at what I didn't say.

"Told him to get to the dickens out of this, and he was taking me at my word. Never meant to let him get farther than the lift. Just wanted to scare him. Sorry now."

But Lovey's account was different.

About seven in the morning there came a streak of wan light down the shaft into which the window of his room looked out. Cantyre murmured something about going back to his own place for a bath.

"All right," I agreed, "and you'd better get your breakfast. When you come back I can do the same. You will come back, won't you?"

"Oh, of course! I sha'n't be gone more than an hour. When he wakes again give him another teaspoonful of this; but don't worry him unless he wakes."

And just then Lovey woke. He woke with a dim smile, as a young child wakes. He smiled at Cantyre first, and then, rolling his soft blue eyes to the other side of the bed, he smiled at me.

"What's up, Slim?" he asked, feebly. "I ain't sick, am I?"

"No, Lovey, old son, you're not sick; you've only had a bit of a fall."

And then it came back to him.

"Oh yes. I know. Served me right, didn't it?" Rolling his eyes now toward Cantyre, he continued: "I was just a-frightenin' of Slim, like. Kind o' foolish, I

was. Said I was goin' to leave him. Didn't mean to go no farther nor the lift."

"I didn't mean to let you go, Lovey," I groaned, humbly.

"Of course you didn't! 'Ow 'uld ye get along without me, I'd like to know? Didn't I keep ye straight all them weeks at the Down and Out?"

"You did, Lovey."

"And 'aven't I saved ye lots o' times since?"

"You have, old man."

"I wouldn't leave ye, not for nothink, Slim. We're buddies as long as we live, ain't we? Didn't ye say that to me yerself?"

"I did, and I'll say it again."

"Well then, what's the use o' talkin'? You mustn't mind me, sonny. I may get into a bad temper and speak 'arsh to you; but I don't mean nothink by it. I wouldn't leave ye, not for—"

The voice trailed away, and presently he was asleep or unconscious again, I couldn't be sure which.

Neither could I be sure whether he believed this version of the tale or whether he concocted it to comfort me. At any rate, it served its purpose in that it eased the situation outwardly, enabling Cantyre and me to face each other without too much self-consciousness.

As a matter of fact, self-consciousness had hardly embarrassed us through the night. There had been too much to think about and to do. The minute I had got Lovey into the living-room and on the couch I had run for Cantyre, and he had run back with me. In the stress of watching the old man's struggle between life and death we felt toward our personal relations what one feels of an exciting play after returning to realities. We were

back on the old terms; we called each other Stephen and Frank. Only now and then, when for a half-hour there was nothing to do but to sit by the bed and watch, did our minds revert to the actual between us.

That is, mine reverted to it, and I suppose his did the same. How he thought of it I cannot tell you; but to me it seemed infinitely trifling. Here was a dying man whose half-lighted spirit was standing on the threshold of a fully lighted world. One might have said that the radiance of the life on which he was entering already shone in the tenderness that began to dawn in the delicate old face. It was a face growing younger, as for two or three years it had grown more spiritual. I saw that now and did justice to it as something big. It was on the level of big things; and love-affairs between men and women were only on the level of the small.

And all over the world big things of the same sort were taking place, some in the sharp flash of an instant, and some as the slow result of years. I had seen so much of it with my own eyes that I could call up vision after vision as I sat alone in the gray morning, watching the soft, sweet pall settle on the old man's countenance, while Cantyre took his bath.

Queerly, out of the unrecorded, or out of what I didn't suppose I had recorded, there flashed a succession of pictures, all of them of the big, the splendid, the worth while. They came inconsequently, without connection with each other, without connection that I could see with the moment I was living through, beyond the fact that they were all on the scale of the big.

There was the recollection of a khaki-clad figure lying face downward on a hillside. I approached him from below, catching sight first of the soles of the huge boots

on which he would never walk again. Coming nearer, I saw his arms outstretched above his head and his nails dug into the earth. He was bleeding from the ears. But when I bent over him to see if he was still alive he said, almost roughly:

"Leave me alone! I can get along all right. Jephson's over there."

I left him alone because there was nothing I could do for him, but when I went to Jephson he was lying on his back, his knees drawn up, and his face twisted into the strangest, most agonized, most heavenly and ecstatic smile you can imagine on a human face.

Then there was a young fellow running at the head of his platoon, a slim young fellow with flaxen hair and a face like a bright angel's, who had been a crack sprinter at McGill. He was long after my time, of course; but I had known his family, and since being in the neighborhood of Ypres I had seen him from time to time. He was not made for a soldier, but a brave young soldier he had become, surmounting fear, repulsion, and all that was hideous to a sensitive soul like his, and establishing those relations with his men that are dearer in many ways than ties of blood. The picture I retain, and which came back to me now, is of his running while his men followed him. It was so common a sight that I would hardly have watched it if it had been any one but him. And then, for no reason evident to me, just as if it was part of the order of the day, he threw up his arms, tottered on a few steps, and went tumbling in the mud, face downward.

With the rapidity of a cinema the scene changed to something else I had witnessed. It was the day I got my dose of shrapnel in the foot. Lying near me was a colonel named Blenkins. Farther off there lay a ser-

geant in his regiment named Day. Day had for Blenkins the kind of admiration that often exists between man and officer for which there is no other name than worship. Slowly, painfully, dying, the non-com. dragged himself over the scarred ground and laid his head on the dying colonel's heart. Painfully, slowly, the dying colonel's hand stole across the dying non-com.'s breast; and in this embrace they slept.

Other memories of the same sort came back to me, disconnected, having no reference to Lovey, or Cantyre, or Regina, or the present, beyond the fact that they came out of the great life of which comradeship was a token and the watchwords rang with generosity.

It was the world of the moment. Such things as I had been recalling had happened that very night; they had happened that very morning; they would happen through that day, and through the next day and the next—till their purpose was accomplished. What that purpose was to be— But that I was to learn a little later.

That is to say, a little later I got a light on the outlook which has been sufficient for me to walk by; but of it I will tell you when the time comes.

For in the mean time the tide was rising. As Lovey lay smiling himself into heaven the national spirit was mounting and mounting, quietly, tensely, with excitement held in leash till the day of the Lord was very near at hand.

All through March events had developed rapidly. On the first day of that month the government had revealed Germany's attempt to stir up Mexico and Japan against the United States. A few days later Germany herself had admitted the instigation. A few days later still

Austria had given her approval to unlimited submarine warfare. A few days later still Nicholas was deposed in Petrograd. The country was marching; the world was marching; the heart was marching. It was difficult for the mind to keep up with the immensity of such happenings or to appraise them at their value. I do not assert that I so appraised them; I only beg you to understand that what I wanted and Cantyre wanted and Regina wanted, each of us for himself and herself, became curiously insignificant.

Not that we were working with the same ends in view. By no means! Cantyre was still opposed to war as war, and bitterly opposed to war if it involved the United States. That he was kicking against the pricks, as Regina asserted, I couldn't see; but that he was feeling the whole situation intensely was quite evident.

The result, however, was the same when it came to balancing personal interests against the public weal. The public weal might mean one thing to him and another thing to me, but to us both it overrode private resentment. There was a moratorium of resentment. We might revive it again; but for the moment it vanished out of sight.

CHAPTER XXXI

SO we came to that determining moment when we held our famous patriotic meeting at the Down and Out.

I call it famous because it was a new point of departure. In all the club's history there had never been a meeting for any other purpose than to screw the courage up to the cutting out of drink. Other subjects had been suggested from time to time; but we had stuck to our last as specialists. We had not been turned aside for philanthropy, for education, for financial benefit, or even for religion in the commonly accepted meaning of that word; and the results had been our justification. But now the flame at the heart of the earth had caught us, and we were all afire.

I mean that we were afire with interest, though the interest was against war as well as for it. But for it or against it, it was the one theme of our discussion; and with cause.

The tide was rising higher, and the spirit of the nation floating on the top. On one of the first days of April the President had asked Congress to declare a state of war with the German Empire. Two days later the Senate voted that declaration. A few nights after that we got together to talk things over at the Down and Out.

It was a crowded meeting, but as you looked round you in advance you would have prophesied a dull one.

Our fellows came from all over New York and the suburbs, washed up, brushed up, and in their Sunday clothes. A few were men of education, but mostly we were of the type generally classed as hard-working. In age we ran from the seventies down to the twenties, with a preponderance of chaps between twenty-five and forty.

What I gathered from remarks before the meeting came to order was a dogged submission to leadership.

"If you was to put it up to us guys to decide the whole thing by ourselves," Beady Lamont said to me as we stood together, "we'd vote ag'in' it. Why? Because we're over here—mindin' our own business—with our kids to take care of—and our business to keep up—and we ain't got no call to interfere in what's no concern of ours. Them fellows over in Europe never could keep still, and they dunno how. But"—he made one of his oratorical gestures with his big left hand—"but if the President says the word—well, we're behind him. He's the country, and when the country speaks there's no Amur'can who ain't ready to give all."

Perhaps he had said something similar to Andrew Christian, because it was that point of being ready to give all which, when he spoke, Christian took as his text.

I am not giving you an account of the whole meeting; I mean only to report a little of what Christian said, and its effect upon Cantyre. Cantyre had come because Regina had insisted; but he sat with the atmosphere of hot, thundery silence wrapping him round.

"To be ready to give all is what the world is summoned to," Christian declared, when he had been asked to say a few words, "and, oh, boys, I beg you to believe that it's time! The call hasn't come a minute too soon,

and we sha'n't be a minute too soon in getting ready to obey it."

"Some of us 'ain't got much to give," a voice came from the back sitting-room.

"We've all got everything there is, if we only understood it," Christian answered, promptly; "but whatever we have, it's something we hold dear."

"If we hold it dear," another voice objected, "why should we be asked to give it up?"

"Because we haven't known how to use it. Think of all you've had in your own life, Tom, and what you've done with it."

I didn't know what Tom had had in his life, but the retort evidently gave him something to turn over in his mind.

"There never was a time in the history of the world," Christian went on, "when the abundance of blessing was more lavishly poured out upon mankind. In every country in both hemispheres we've had the treasures of the earth, the sea, and the air positively heaped upon us. Food, clothing, comfort, security, speed—have become the commonplaces of existence. The children of to-day grow up to a use of trains and motors and telephones and airplanes that would have seemed miraculous as short a time ago as when I was a lad. The standard of living has been so quickly raised that the poor have been living in a luxury unknown to the rich of two or three generations ago. The Atlantic has got to be so narrow that we count the time of our crossing it by hours. The globe has become so small that young people go round it for a honeymoon. People whose parents found it difficult to keep one house have two or three, and even more. There is money everywhere — private fortunes that

would have staggered the imagination of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba and Augustus and Charlemagne all combined. Amusements are so numerous that they pall on us. In lots of the restaurants of New York you can order a meal for yourself alone, and feel that neither Napoleon nor Queen Victoria nor the Czar could possibly have sat down to a better one."

"Some could," one of our objectors declared, with all sorts of implications in his tone.

"Oh, I'm not saying there are no inequalities or that there is just distribution of all this blessing. In fact, my point is that there is not. All I'm asserting is that the blessing is there, and that the very windows of heaven have been opened on the world in order to pour it out."

"I never saw none of it," a thin, sour fellow put in, laconically.

"But, Juleps, that's what I'm coming to. The blessing was there, and some of us wouldn't try to get what belonged to us, and others of us collared too much, and we treated it very much as children treat pennies in a scramble. We did far worse than that. We rifled, we stole, we gobbled, we guzzled, we strutted, we bragged; the fellow that was up kicked the fellow that was down to keep him down; the fellow that had plenty sneaked and twisted and cringed and cadged in order to get more; and we've all worked together to create the world that's been hardly fit to live in, that every one of us has known. Now, boys, isn't that so? Speak out frankly."

Since in that crowd there could not be two opinions as to the world being hardly fit to live in, there was a general murmur of assent.

"Now wealth is a great good thing; and what I mean

by wealth is the general storehouse, free to us all, which we call the earth and the atmosphere round it. I don't have to tell you that it's a storehouse crammed in every crack and cranny with the things you and I need for our enjoyment. And it isn't a storehouse such as you and I would fill, which has got only what we could put into it; it's always producing more. Production is its law. It's never idle. It's incessantly working. The more we take out of it the more it yields. I don't say that we can't exhaust it in spots by taxing it too much; of course we can. Greed will exhaust anything, just as it's exhausting, under our very eyes, our forests, our fisheries, and our farms. But in general there's nothing that will respond to good treatment more surely than the earth, nor give us back a bigger interest on the labor we put into it."

"That's so," came from some one who had perhaps been a farmer.

"And so," Christian went on, "we've had a world that's given us everything in even greater abundance than we could use. We've had food to waste; we've had clothes for every shade of temperature; we've had coal for our furnaces, and iron for our buildings, and steel for our ships, and gasolene for our automobiles. We've had every invention that could help us to save time, to save worry, to save labor, to save life. Childhood has been made more healthy; old age more vigorous. That a race of young men and young women has been growing up among us of whom we can say without much exaggeration that humanity is becoming godlike, any one can see who goes round our schools and colleges."

He took a step forward, throwing open his palms in a gesture of demand.

"But, fellows, what good has all this prodigious plenty

been doing us? Has it made us any better? Have we become any more thankful that we all had enough and to spare? Have we been any more eager to see that when we had too much the next man had a sufficiency? Have we rejoiced in this plenitude as the common delight of every one? Have we seen it as the manifestation of the God who expresses Himself in all good things, and Who has given us, as one of the apostles says, all things richly to enjoy? Has it brought us any nearer Him? Has it given us any increased sympathy with Him? Or have we made it minister to our very lowest qualities, to our appetites, to our insolence, to our extravagance, to our sheer pride that all this was ours, to wallow in, to waste, and to despise?

"You know we have done the last. There isn't a man among us who hasn't done it to a greater or less degree. There is hardly a man in New York who hasn't lived in the lust of the purely material. You may go through the world and only find a rarefied creature here and there who hasn't reveled and rioted and been silly and vain and arrogant to the fullest extent that he dared."

The wee bye Daisy was sitting in the front row, looking up at the speaker raptly.

"I haven't, Mr. Christian," he declared, virtuously.

"Then, Daisy, you're the rarefied creature I said was an exception. Most of us have," he went on when the roar of laughter subsided. "If we haven't in one way we have in another. And what has been the result? Covetousness, hatred, class rivalry, capital and labor bitternesses, war. And now we've come to a place where by a queer and ironical judgment upon us the struggle for possession is going to take from us all that we possess."

He thrust his hands into his trousers pockets and spoke casually, confidentially.

"For, boys, that's what I'm coming to. All the good things we have are going to be taken away from us. Since we don't know how to use them, and won't learn, we've got to give them back."

"Oh, I don't believe that, Mr. Christian," a common-sense voice cried out in a tone of expostulation.

"Peter, you'll see. You'll only have to live a few months longer to find yourself like every one else in America, lacking the simple essentials you've always taken as a matter of course. It isn't luxuries alone that you'll be called on to give up; it will be the common necessaries of every-day life. The great summons is coming to us, not merely from our government, not merely from the terrified and stricken nations of mankind, but from God above—to give everything back to Him. I don't say that we shall starve or that we shall freeze; but we may easily be cold and hungry and driven to a cheese-paring economy we never expected to practise. The light will be taken from our lamps, the work from our fingers, the money from our pockets. We shall be searched to the very soul. There's nothing we sha'n't have to surrender. At the very least we must give tithes of all that we possess, signifying our willingness to give more."

"Some of us 'ain't got nothing."

It was the bitter cry of the dispossessed.

"Yes, Billy; we've all got life; and life, too, we shall have to offer up. There are some of you chaps sitting here that in all human probability will be called on to do it."

"You won't, Mr. Christian. You're too old."

"I'm too old, Spud, but my two boys are not; and

they're getting ready now. Whether it's harder or easier to let them go rather than for me to go myself I leave to any of you guys that have kids."

"Perhaps it won't be as bad as what you think."

"Jimmy, I'm only reasoning from what I see in the world already. When the human race is being trodden in the wine-press we in America can't expect to be spared. If any of you want to know what's happening to the kind of world we've made for ourselves let him read the eighteenth chapter of the book of the Revelation. That chapter might be written of Europe as it is at this minute. Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen. The kings of the earth stand off from her, crying, Alas! alas! that great city Babylon, for in one hour is her judgment come! The merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, for no man buyeth their merchandise any more, saying, Alas! alas! that great city, which was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, for in one hour so great riches is come to naught. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, cast dust on their heads and cry over her, Alas! alas! that great city wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour she is made desolate."

"But that ain't us."

"No, Headlights, that's not us. I agree with you that there's a difference. America is not in the same boat with Europe—not quite—but very nearly. Perhaps because our crimes are not so black we've been given the chance to do what we have to do more of our own free act. From Europe what she had has been taken away violently, whether she would or no. We have the

chance to come before the throne of God and offer it back of our own free will. You see the difference! And, oh, boys, I want you to do it—"

"It ain't for us, Mr. Christian, to decide that."

"Oh yes, it is, Beady! It's for each of us to offer willingly in his own heart. Not just to the government—not just to the country—not just to France or Belgium or any other nation that's in a tight place—but to that blessed and heavenly Father Who's giving us this wonderful chance to put everything into His hands again, and get it all back for redistribution. Don't you see? That's it—the redistribution! A better world has to come out of this—a juster world—a happier world—a cleaner world. And in that reconstruction we Americans have the chance to take the lead because we're doing it of our own accord. Every other country has some ax to grind; but we have none. We've none except just to be in the big movement of all mankind upward and forward. But the difference between us and every other country—unless it's the British Empire—is that we do it man by man, each stepping out of the ranks in his turn as if he was the only one and everything depended on his act. It's up to you, Beady; it's up to me; it's up to each American singly."

"Why ain't it up to every European singly?"

"It is. They're just beginning to understand that it is. The Englishman, the Frenchman, the Italian, they're beginning to see that the democracy we talk so much about isn't merely a question of the vote—that it isn't primarily a question of the vote at all—it's one of self-government in the widest and yet the most personal sense. The great summons is not to mankind in nations; it's to mankind as individuals. It's to Tom and Jimmy and

Peter and Headlights and Daisy and every one who has a name. It's the individual who makes the country, who forms the army, who becomes the redemptive element. In proportion as the individual cleanses himself from the national sin the national sin is wiped out. So it's by Englishmen and Englishwomen that England will renew itself—"

I think it was my old friend, the Irish hospital attendant, who called out, "What's England's national sin?"

The question brought the speaker to a halt. He seemed to reflect.

"What's England's national sin?" he repeated. "I should say—mind you, I'm not sitting in judgment on any one or any people—but we've all got to clean our stables, even if it takes the labors of Hercules to accomplish it—I should say England's national vice—the vice that's been eating the heart out of her body, and the spirit out of her heart—is sensuality."

"What's the matter with France?"

"I'm not an international physician with a specialty for diagnosis," Christian laughed; "but in my opinion France has been corroded through and through with sordidness. She's been too petty, too narrow, too mean, too selfish—"

"Say, boss, tell us about my country."

"You mean, Italy, Tony? Haven't you got to get rid of your superstition, and all the degrading things superstition brings with it? I want you to understand that we're talking of national errors, not of national virtues."

"Have we got a national error in the United States?"

"What do you think, Tapley? Isn't it as plain as the nose on your face? Isn't it written all over the country, on every page of every newspaper you pick up?"

"What? What is it?" came from several voices at once.

"Dishonesty!" he cried, loudly. "We Americans have got our good points, but of them honesty is the very smallest. If any one called us a nation of sharpers he wouldn't be very far wrong. Our notion of competition is to get the better of the other fellow, by foul means if it can't be done by fair. That's the case in private life, and when it comes to public—well, did you ever hear of anything that we ever undertook as a people that didn't have to be investigated before very long? You can hardly read a daily paper in which the investigation of some public trust isn't going on. Dishonesty is stamped deep, deep into the American character as it is to-day; and for that very reason, if for no other, we've got to give everything back. If we don't it will be taken from us by main force; and we're not of the type to wait for that."

He seemed to gather himself together. His face, always benignant, began to glow with an inward light.

"But, boys, what I want you to understand is that we can make this act of offering as a great act of faith. Every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down! We can take our good gifts and our perfect gifts and hand them up! We can anticipate their being taken from us by giving them. We can give them as men who know whence they have been received, and where they will be held in trust for us—not grudgingly nor of necessity, as the Bible tells us, for God loveth a cheerful giver. Now is the time for us to test that love—every man for himself. The appeal is to the individual. Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom, according to the measure that ye mete. For this

giving isn't to men, it's to God; it isn't a portion, it's all; it isn't limited to material things, it includes our love and our life. It's the great summons; it's the great surrender. And—boys—my dear old boys who've been saved from other things—we've all been saved for this—for something we never expected, but which isn't hard to do when you look at it in the right way—to hand ourselves back, in body, mind, and possessions, to Him from whom we came, that He may make a new use of us and begin all over again."

And the first thing I saw when he stopped was Cantyre springing forward to grasp him by the hand.

CHAPTER XXXII

WHEN I got out the streets were already buzzing with a rumor that no extra had as yet proclaimed. The House of Representatives had followed the Senate in voting for war, and the President was about to sign the declaration.

But I forgot this on arriving at the flat, for Lovey was propped up in bed, with his thin nose in the air, making little sniffs.

"I smell it, Slim," he smiled, as I entered. "Kind of a coffee smell it is now, with a dash o' bacon and heggs."

"That smell is always round this flat, Lovey," I said, trying to be casual. "It's all the breakfasts you and I have eaten—"

"Oh no, Slim. You can't be mistook in this; and besides—" He made a sign to the man nurse who for the past week or two Cantyre had sent in from one of his hospitals. "You clear out, d'ye 'ear? I want to talk to my buddy, private-like."

The man strolled out to the living-room, whispering to me as he passed: "There's a change in him. I don't think he'll last through the night."

"Come and sit 'ere, sonny," Lovey commanded as soon as we were alone. "I've got somethin' special-like to tell ye. Did ye know," he went on, when I was seated beside the bed, "as I'd seen Lizzy—and she 'adn't her neck broke at all. She was lovely."

"Where?" I asked, to humor him.

"Right 'ere—right beside that there chair that you're a-sittin' in."

"When?"

"Oh, on and off—pretty near all the time now."

"You mean that she comes and goes?"

"No; not just comin' and goin'. She's—she's kind o' 'ere all the time, only sometimes I ain't lookin'." His face became alight. "There she is now—and a great long street be'ind 'er. No, it ain't a street; it's just all lovely-like, and Lizzy with 'er neck as straight as a walkin'-stick—and not a drinkin'-woman no more she don't look—it's kind o' beautiful like, Slim, only—only I can't make ye understand."

Sighing fretfully over his inability to explain, he lapsed into that state of which I never was sure whether it was sleep or unconsciousness.

The coma lasted for a great part of the night. Sending the nurse to lie down, I sat and watched, chiefly because I had too much on my mind and in my heart to want to go to bed. Every two or three hours Cantyre stole in, in his dressing-gown, finding nothing he could do. Once or twice I was tempted to ask him what he thought of Christian's talk, but, fearing to break the spell it might have wrought in him, I refrained. He himself didn't mention it, nor did he seem to know that I had observed his impulsive, shaking hands.

On one of the occasions when he was with me Lovey opened his eyes suddenly, beginning to murmur something we couldn't understsnd.

"What is it, old chap?" Cantyre questioned, bending over him and listening.

But Lovey was already articulating brokenly. It took

two or three repetitions, or attempts at repetition, for Cantyre to be in a position to interpret.

"What's he trying to say?" I inquired.

Cantyre pretended to arrange the bottles on the table beside the bed so as not to have to look at me.

"He says, or he's doing his best to say, 'I didn't say nothink but what was for everybody's good.'"

It was on my lips to retort, "Perhaps he didn't."

I left that, however, for Cantyre, who went back to his rooms without comment.

He returned in the small hours of the morning, and once more we sat, one on one side of the bed and the other on the other, in what was practically silence. All I could say of it was that it had become a sympathetic silence. Why it was sympathetic I didn't know: but the unclassified perceptions told me that it was.

When Lovey opened his eyes again it was with the air of not having been asleep or otherwise away from us.

"I saved ye, Slim, didn't I?"

"Yes, Lovey, old man, you did."

"Kep' straight so as you would keep straight too?"

"Yes, Lovey."

"Ye'd never 'a' done it if it 'adn't been for me?"

"No, Lovey."

"And I'd never 'a' gone away from ye, Slim. I was just a—a-frightenin' of you. I didn't mean no 'arm at all, I didn't."

"I know, Lovey."

He fixed his glazing eyes upon me as he said, "I told ye my name wasn't Lovey, didn't I?"

"No, but that doesn't matter."

"No, that doesn't matter now. We're fellas together, so what's the diff? . . . I don't care where we sleeps to-

night, so long as you're there, sonny. . . . Greeley's Slip is good enough for mine, if I can snuggle up to you, like. . . . Ye don't mind, do ye?"

I put my arm round his shoulder, raising him.

"No, Lovey, I don't mind. Just snuggle up."

"'Old me 'and, sonny."

I took his hand in mine as his head rested on my shoulder.

He gave a long, restful sigh.

"Lizzy says it's an awful nice place where she is, and—"

I felt him slipping down in bed; but Cantyre, who knew more of such cases than I did, caught him gently round the loins and lowered him.

CHAPTER XXXIII

ON coming back the next afternoon from selecting the spot for Lovey's grave there was a man in khaki on the train. When I got out at the Grand Central I saw another. In Fifth Avenue I saw another and another. They seemed to spring out of the ground, giving a new aspect to the streets. In the streets that shining thing I had noticed on landing was no longer to be seen. Silver peace had faded out, while in its place there was coming —coming by degrees—but coming—that spirit of strong resolve which is iron and gold.

Or perhaps I had better say that peace had taken refuge in my dingy little flat, where Lovey was lying on his bed in his Sunday clothes, with hands folded on his breast. Peace was in every line of the fragile figure; in the face there was peace satisfied—peace content—gentle, abiding, eternal.

Two days later a little company of us stood by his grave while Rufus Legrand read the ever-stirring words of the earth to earth. It was the old comradeship which Lovey himself would have liked—the fellowship of men who had fought the same fight as he, and were hoping to be faithful unto death like him—Christian, Straight, little Spender, Beady, Pyn, the wee bye Daisy, and one or two others. Cantyre alone had none of the dark memories—and yet the bright and blessed memories—that held the rest of us together; but Cantyre had his place.

We had driven out side by side in the same motor, as what the undertaker called chief mourners. I don't remember that we uttered a word to each other till we got out at the grave.

It was Cantyre who said, then: "I want you to drive back with me, Frank. There's somewhere I should like to take you."

Reassured by his use of my name, I merely nodded, wondering what he meant.

I didn't ask, however; nor did I ask when we were back in the motor again and on our way to town. I got my first hint as we began to descend the long avenue in which Sterling Barry had his house.

As I expected, we stopped at the door. The vacant lot was still vacant, and among its dead stalks of burdock and succory April was bringing the first shades of soft green. I thought of Lovey, of course; of our tramp round Columbus Circle; of my midnight adventure right on this spot. It was like going back to another life; it was as this life must have seemed to Lovey and his Lizzy reunited in that world where her neck was as straight as a walking-stick, and everything was lovely-like.

Cantyre spoke low, as if he could hardly speak at all. "I asked Regina to be in. She'll be expecting us."

And she was. She was expecting us in that kind of agitation which hides itself under a pretense of being more than usually cool. In sympathy with Lovey's memory, I suppose, she was dressed in black, which made a foil for her vivid lips and eyes. Out of the latter she was unable to keep a shade of feverish brightness that belied the nonchalance of her greeting.

She talked about Lovey, about the funeral, about the weather, about the declaration of war, about the men in

khaki who with such surprising promptness had begun to appear in the streets. She talked rapidly, anxiously, against time, as it were, and busied herself pouring tea. Suspecting, doubtless, that Cantyre had something special to say, she was trying to fight him off from it as long as possible.

I had taken a seat; he remained standing, his back to the fire. His look was abstracted, thundery, morose.

Right in the middle of what Regina was saying about the seizure of the German ships he dropped with the remark, "You two know what Lovey told me—what he's been telling me ever since you both came home."

Neither of us had a word to say. We could only stare. You could hear the mantel-piece clock ticking before he went on again.

"Well, I'm not going to give you up, Regina," he declared, aggressively, then.

One of her hands was on the handle of the teapot; one was in the act of taking up a cup. If coloring was ever transmuted into flame, her coloring was at that moment. There was a dramatic intensity in her quietness.

"Have I asked you to, Stephen?"

"No; but—"

"Have I?" I demanded.

"No; but—"

"If Lovey did it it was without any knowledge of mine," I continued. "I practically killed him, God forgive me, for doing it!"

"You're both off the track," Cantyre broke in. "You don't know what I—what I want to say."

"Very well, then, Stephen. Tell us," Regina said, tranquilly.

He spoke stammeringly. "It's—it's—just this: This is no time—for—for—love."

We stared again, waiting for him to go on.

"It's what—what Christian told us two or three nights ago. We're in a world where—where love and marriage are no longer the burning questions. They're too small. Don't you see?"

We continued to stare, but we agreed with him.

"So—so," he faltered, "I want you—I want you both—to—to put it all off."

"The moratorium of love?" I suggested.

"The moratorium of everything," he took up, "but what—what Christian put before us. I see that now more plainly than I ever saw anything in my life. We've got to give everything up—and get it back—different. We shall be different, too—and things that we're struggling over now will be settled for us, I suppose, without our taking them into our own hands at all. That's how I look at it, if you two will agree."

"I agree, Stephen," Regina said, with the same tranquillity.

"And I, too, old chap."

"I'm—I'm going over," he stumbled on, "with the first medical unit from Columbia—"

"Oh, Stephen! How splendid!"

He contradicted her. "No, it isn't. I'm not doing it from any splendid motives whatever. I'm going just to—to try and get out of myself. Don't you see—you two? You must see. I'm—I'm sunk in myself; I've never been anything else. That's what's been the matter with me. That's why I never made any friends. That's why you, Frank, have never really cared a straw about me—in spite of all the ways I've made up to you; and why

you, Regina, can hardly stand me. But, by God! you're both going to!"

With this flash of excitement I sprang up, laying my hand on his arm.

"We care for you already, old man."

"That's not the point. I've—I've got to care for myself. I've got to find some sort of self-respect."

But Regina, too, sprang up, joining us where we stood on the hearth-rug. She didn't touch him; she only stood before him with hands clasped in front of her.

"Stephen dear, you're not doing any more heart-searching than Frank and I are doing; or than every true American is doing all through the country. What you say Mr. Christian told you the other night is more or less consciously in everybody's soul. We know we're called to the judgment seat; and at the judgment seat we stand. That's all there is to it. Marriage and giving in marriage for people like us must wait. It's become unimportant. There are people—younger than we are for the most part—to whom it comes first. But for us, with our experience—each of us—you with yours, Frank with his, I with mine—well, we have other work to do. We must see this great thing through before we can give our attention to ourselves. And we shall see it through, sha'n't we, by doing as you say? We must give everything up—and wait. Then we shall probably find our difficulties solved for us. I often think that patience—the power to wait and be confident—is the most stupendous force in the world."

And with few more words than this we left her. I went first, giving them a little time alone together. But I hadn't gone very far before, on accidentally turning round, I saw Cantyre coming down the steps.

CHAPTER XXXIV

IT was just a year later that a secret but profound misgiving in my heart began to be dispelled.

I call it secret because it was unacknowledged by myself. It would never, I believe, have come to me of its own accord; it was suggested from without, and even so I didn't harbor it consciously. It was only with the news of Seicheprey, of which the details began to come in toward the end of April, 1918, that I knew that in the wheat of my hopes and confidences there had been tares of anxiety and fear.

I had seen too many of those strapping, splendid fellows not to be confident and hopeful. But I had also read too much of the folly of pitting green boys, however magnificently built, against the seasoned troops of long campaigns, not to have a lurking dread as to the test. I never voiced the question, not even to my own heart; yet Satan, the manufacturer of fear, had not failed to formulate it to my subconsciousness. What if this noble America, so strong, so generous, so ready to respond to that call which Christian had uttered, so eager to pour out its all, with both hands, gladly, gaily—what if now, before the guns of a ruthless and unconquerable foe, she should meet the disaster that would bring her to the dust? What if those beloved boys, all sinew and muscle as they were, should go down as I had seen my fellow-countrymen go down, in heaps that showed the impotence of

valor? I had witnessed so much sacrifice—sacrifice by mistake, sacrifice by lack of skill, sacrifice by lack of knowledge that could have been obtained—that when I looked at these lads my heart sank at moments when it should have been most buoyant.

Then came Seicheprey, and I knew.

Then came the Marne, the Ourcq, the Vesle; and I was satisfied.

For the cause had absorbed me again, heart and soul and mind. I was being sent all over the country, and sometimes into Canada, to speak for it. In this way I came to be in a small town in the Middle West—Mendoza happened to be its name—when, picking up a paper, I saw that a hospital had been bombed. The next edition reported that two doctors and three or four nurses had been killed. The next told us their names. Among the names was . . .

And so he did give his all.

I didn't write to Regina; Regina didn't write to me. She was busy, as I was busy; but somewhere in the distance and the silence between us there was a place where our spirits met.

And when we met in person we still didn't speak of it. It was too deep, too sacred, too complicated and strange to go readily into words. It was easier and more natural to talk of something else.

That was at Rosyth, on Long Island, at the end of June. Hearing that I had returned to New York for a rest, Hilda Grace asked me down for the week-end, just as she had asked me exactly four years before.

On this occasion she made no attempt to sound me; she mentioned Regina only to say that she was at the red-and-yellow house on the opposite hill for a little rest

on her part. By disappearing after lunch on Sunday she gave me to understand that I was free.

I went to the old Hornblower house by the way I had taken when I had last come away from it—down Mrs. Grace's steps to the beach—along the shore—and up the steps to the lawn where the foxgloves bordered the scrub-oak.

I went back to the veranda where I had waited and sat down in one of the same chairs. Taking out a cigarette, I lighted it and began to smoke.

Perhaps some one had seen me from a window, for in a little while there was the click of high heels on the bare steps of the stairway. Then out on the veranda came a figure too little to be tall and too tall to be considered little, carrying herself proudly, placing her dainty feet daintily, but advancing toward me instead of going away. She was dressed in white, with a scarlet band about her waist and another about her dashing Panama, of the same shade as her lips. In the opening at the neck she wore a string of pearls. Lower down, the opening was fastened by a diamond bar-pin. In her hand she carried a gold-mesh purse, which she threw carelessly on a table as she passed.

She met me as any hostess meets a man who comes to make a call. We talked of the topics of the day, beginning with the weather. From the weather we passed to the war, and to all our anxieties and humiliations through the spring. We could do this, however, with a ray of cheerfulness, because the Château-Thierry salient was beginning to be wiped out.

"But why do things have to happen the way they do?" I asked her. "If we're going to win, why couldn't we have won from the first? What's the use of all this back-

ing and filling, this losing and taking, and relosing and retaking, the same old ground? Oh, I know there are the usual explanations as to our not being up to the mark in munitions and man power; but I mean what is the explanation from the point of view of an All-Powerful and All-Intelligent—?"

"Isn't it the same explanation that applies to every human life?"

"Well, what's that?"

"I don't know that I can tell you," she smiled, thoughtfully; "but I do feel sure that we need our experiences. With minds and natures like ours we're not fitted to go straight and simply from point to point. The long way round has to be our short way home, and—and—the way things happen is the best way. . . . Oh, dear, what's happening?"

It was admirably staged. The slipping of the string of pearls to the floor could hardly have been another accident. For me there was but one thing to do.

Springing to my feet I stooped and picked the necklet up. Having picked it up, I put it in my pocket.

I stood smiling down at her. She sat smiling up at me. There was more in that smile than a lifetime of words could have uttered.

But when I was about to pull the pearls out of my pocket again she leaned forward and said, huskily: "Don't, Frank. Keep them."

I looked at her, puzzled. "Why, Regina?"

"Because some day you—you'll give them back to me. Till then they'll be yours. They'll be a symbol—a pledge."

"Will it be—some day—some day—soon?"

"Not so very soon, Frank. I must still have time

to—to think of Stephen. I cared for him—in my way."

"I think of him, too," I said, shakily. "It seems hard that he should have had to give everything, when I'm—I'm getting everything."

"Oh, death isn't so terrible—or so significant. There wouldn't be so much of it if it was. I only mean—but I can't explain to you. We must get a little farther on—not only you and I—but our country—our countries—we must give still more—we must at least offer all even if it isn't all taken away from us—before it's given back to us—renewed—purified."

"And then?"

"Oh, then!"

But the glow in her face said the rest.

THE END